

MEN'S HEALING IN CONNECTION:
TOWARD MUTUALLY EMPATHIC FATHERCARE

A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Mark Lloyd Richardson
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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

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ABSTRACT

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Toward Mutually Empathic Fathercare
by

Mark Lloyd Richardson

Drawing upon an analysis of self-in-relation theory in Chapter 3, fathercare is conceptualized as the relationship a father offers his children that is characterized by emotional connection and mutual empathy. Yet for fathers to participate fully in nurturing their children it is important that their own wounds related to absent or abusive fathers and to the disconnections inherent in male models of power are in the process of being healed. The nature of this male woundedness and paths leading toward healing are explored in Chapter 2. The process of healing involves a man in learning to relate empathically with his self-images and his images of his father, both past and present. This can be accomplished within an intentional community of men which engenders trust and openness for sharing men's experiences. A spirituality for working with men in community is portrayed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 discusses the formation of a father's group in which the therapeutic value of developing relational connections among men has been tested. The implications of this group work are especially great with regard to raising sons who will have a model of mutually empathic

fathercare to draw upon for future family relationships and for the general benefit of society. The theoretical base of person-centered counseling, mutual support, and a growth orientation are discussed within the context of self-in-relation's theory of mutually empathic relationships. The use of imagination in listening to stories is considered as a method for putting men in touch with their emotional and spiritual lives. The initial six sessions, representing the beginning stage in the group's development, are outlined. Participants' evaluations and the author's pastoral observations of the effectiveness of the group inform additional pastoral implications and proposals in Chapter 6.

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This project is dedicated to my son, Ethan Towne,
and to my daughter, Hannah Kelsey,
whose exuberant young lives
have taught me the power of smiles and tears,
by allowing me to be their father.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Problem Addressed by the Project

This project deals with the difficulty many men have creating and sustaining emotional connections with their children, especially their sons. Many men, particularly those of the baby boom generation, grew up in households with either physically or emotionally absent fathers. The wounds created by this absence are deep, and not only diminish a man's awareness of and appreciation for his own emotional life but produce an internal sense of inadequacy making it difficult for him to connect emotionally with others. Also, the relationship between father and son seemingly contains within it the seeds of competitiveness inherent in male models of power. Boys tend to be taught a model of power-over-others as they grow up and then carry its lessons into their adult relationships, sometimes leading to aggression or violence. This model cripples the likelihood of developing mutually empowering relationships based upon a relational model of shared power--or what might be called power-with-others.

Men who become fathers today face a difficult and sometimes confusing array of expectations between their work and families in light of changing gender roles. Work has generally been one of the primary means through which men measure their self-worth. Today, employers demand

incredible commitment of men's time and energy if men wish to succeed in the workplace. The tension between wanting to provide (even if his spouse works outside of the home) and wanting to be at home more with his family can become unbearable at times for a man who wishes to be a more involved father. Increasingly, however, many men are realizing that excessive work demands rob them of precious time with their children that can never be retrieved. Yet men who seek to structure their work obligations according to family priorities often discover that their employers are less than supportive. In other words, conscientious men who become fathers today are entering into uncharted territory--wanting to try new models of actively engaged fatherhood, while at the same time being able to find fulfillment in their work.

A general lack of societal and institutional support, however, makes changing outmoded models of fatherhood based on traditional understandings of masculinity a challenging process. Prevailing cultural views of the father's role in the family remain ambiguous, and often cast the father in the traditional role of breadwinner more than caregiver. Today's cultural images of fatherhood also include those of the deadbeat dad and the abusive dad. Fortunately though, in part because of the feminist movement's impetus in redefining gender roles along more equitable lines, many of the current generation of fathers are discovering within

themselves a more nurturing expression of fatherhood. These men are seeking to provide a kind of caregiving marked by more active involvement and interest in the emotional, social and spiritual well-being of their children, what I refer to as fathercare.

Importance of the Problem

There is little opportunity for men to talk with other men about their feelings and concerns, and to receive support for the awesome task of being a father. Men's groups, where they exist, have been providing an opportunity for such exploration and mutual support. It is true that the men's movement in this country has been predominately comprised of persons like myself: white, middle-class, heterosexual, and often well educated. Such commonalities in life experience and social location have perhaps been assumed by men involved in the men's movement. Increasingly, however, men of color, working-class men, gay and bisexual men, pro-feminist men, and men who have had less formal education than some, are finding their own place and their own voice in a movement every bit as varied as the women's movement. The changing composition of the men's movement represents a significant challenge to the assumptions of commonality and is a cause for hope in creating a more just society based upon an appreciation of difference.

The idea for this project grew out of my need to

address the wounds of my own experience of growing up male and having an absent father. I recognize more clearly now that while many men have probably experienced wounding realities similar to mine in their lives, there are also many men whose experience has been quite different. In part, these differences in experience are a reflection of the socio-cultural and economic forces mentioned above. In part, they are simply a matter of the health of individual families. I therefore cannot claim to speak for all men or even most men, but rather a significant number of men in today's society who have known the pain of growing up in "the vacuum of the missing father who is too busy with 'important' things to enfold them in his arms, too serious to play."¹ Male gender socialization has contributed to the emotional disconnections between fathers and sons in our society.

Men desperately need a place to talk with one another about their struggles and disappointments, their joys and satisfactions, especially as these relate to their family relationships. In particular, there are often very powerful emotions tied up in the relationship a man has with his own father. These very emotions, which may have gone unrecognized or been repressed, are a part of the reason that intimacy is so difficult for men to achieve in

¹ Sam Keen, The Passionate Life: Stages of Loving (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 48.

their own families and friendships. As men listen to one another and discover that others have also felt wounded by the absent or abusive fathers in their lives, the process of healing can be begun. Men become acquainted with their own needs and vulnerability, and as a result, discover a greater capacity within themselves for mutually empathic relationships with those about whom they care. They also discover that it is possible to receive fathering from other men and from themselves, and in so doing, to heal some of the wounds of the child within them.

An underlying assumption of this discussion is that the mission of the Church is to be in ministry whenever and wherever persons are struggling and hurting, not only for the sake of individuals but of the local communities and larger societies of which they are a part. The world is constantly changing, with gender roles shifting to adapt to new demands for equity at work and partnership in the home. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for parents seeking to prepare their children for a new future. Children need the support and nurture of parents who will be emotionally present to them. Thus the Church needs to be involved in efforts to assist men who are fathers in their journeys toward healing, particularly from the father wound so many suffer in one form or another. The Church can provide the support that men need in order to experiment with emerging models of fatherhood for a

changing society. Men caring for and relating to one another in community is potentially a very redemptive activity, not only for themselves, but for all whose lives intersect with theirs.

Thesis of the Project

This project undertakes to assess the effectiveness of group work with men who are or expect to be fathers, during which we explored the father wound within us, the dynamics of shame, grief and anger in our lives, and the need to develop relationships of mutuality and empathic attunement with our children, spouses and friends. Through mutual support, storytelling, and personal sharing, we worked on healing the wounds we experienced. We considered what kinds of fathers we hoped to be.

The thesis of this project is that by learning the capacities for empathic listening and mutuality within the context of a group for fathers, men will be empowered to exercise these capacities within their family relationships with children and spouses. In so doing, men will be providing models of masculinity and fathercare which seek deep mutual connections with others.

Rationale for the Project

I have been on an emotional and spiritual journey for a number of years now--a journey on which I have sought to find healing for wounds carried within me since childhood, wounds of the soul which have seemed overwhelming at times.

The road I have traveled is a winding one, and I have stopped along the way to see what I might learn about myself from others.

I have learned about family emotional systems and how a person can become trapped in certain roles in order to maintain the equilibrium of the system. I have read books about recovery for adult children of dysfunctional families and worked at healing the inner child in me. I have been prescribed medication for depression. I have talked about my struggles with counselors, my wife, and other friends who would listen, usually women. I have tried to fill the void inside of me with study and work, and occasionally alcohol. At other times I have simply tried to sleep through the pain.

I have hoped to find someone who would understand so that the pain might be relieved somewhat. In my better moments I have trusted that personal and spiritual transformation is possible when one opens oneself to the truest parts of one's soul. For the pain carried in this inner wound is so deep as to sometimes touch despair.

My experience growing up male is perhaps typical of many men my age. I am not unique in my pain. However, many men refuse to face their pain because of the intense feelings of vulnerability and being out-of-control which accompany it. The pain results from a complex mix of familial, religious, moral, and cultural forces which

conspire to bring shame to a growing boy's life. Eventually the experience of living with shame may result in anger or grief, which gets directed both inward upon oneself and outward toward others. The potential for violence begins in the inability many men experience in recognizing and feeling the pain of these powerful emotions. They are then carried into other relationships, often unconsciously.

But blaming himself, or others, only leaves a man stuck in destructive patterns, directing his attention away from his pain. Is there a way to use the pain creatively to contribute toward psychological and spiritual growth and healing? At some point a man needs to acknowledge the pain that does exist and take steps to move into it. Such deliberate movement begins a process of grieving which acknowledges the reality of the absent father--not only a man's actual father, but the images and memories and potentials of the father within the man. Eventually a man may be able to move through the pain by hearing the wisdom of the ages--the wisdom of stories and storytellers--talk of the value of suffering in a way that creates new meanings for his life.

Unfortunately, it is much more tempting to do what a more traditional male role demands: swallow the pain and deny it until it surfaces again in some other guise. Violence, addiction, abusive behavior, and health problems

are frequently among the results when emotional, spiritual, or psychological pain is suppressed or denied. Men are socialized from an early age that it is not okay to express their feelings in the presence of others. They must be strong, independent, and free from self-doubt. Any less will not earn them the respect and admiration they desire from women or other men.

There is a battle of sorts waging within me as I write this project. One way of describing it is that the critical parent in me (my judgmental, observing self) is keeping a close watch on the hurt child to be sure he doesn't whine too much or let the family secrets out of the bag. As I write about my feelings and experiences as a man, this critical part of myself tells me not to take myself too seriously. After all, everyone has troubles. Who says I should be immune? Who says it should be any different for me than for a multitude of other members of society? White, middle-class men like myself have suffered little in the larger scheme of events.

Why must I expose my pain and vulnerability when it surely will result only in ridicule or rejection? No one wants to know--much less befriend--a "weak" or "fragile" man (which is how vulnerability translates in the lives of men in our culture). I don't. Most of the time I don't want to know or befriend this vulnerable underside of myself; it doesn't represent what I want to be, or what

I've been taught I should be from many sources.

"So stop writing, Mark," says the judgmental voice. "Work instead on a topic that allows you to remain more detached and objective."

The battle within has to do in part with a lack of confidence in my own ideas, and how this lack reflects on my manhood. I ask myself, will my writing be pitied? Will it be scorned? Do I have anything worthwhile to say? What difference does it really make whether I write this or not? The self-critical voice sounds shrilly and forcefully in my consciousness.

Fortunately, I am stubborn enough to talk back to that voice in a way I never dared talk to my real parents. "I have come this far by listening to my heart and no one can tell me to turn back!" I declare emphatically. "Not parents, not family, not teachers, not superiors, not faith tradition, and not the cultural stereotype of the ideal male as strong and invulnerable--nothing and no one!"

In my search for healing I have found it necessary to put aside qualities which once seemed positive: naivete and niceness. I have also sought to balance emotional defenses (as necessary as these have been for my survival) with a more proactive and responsible stance. Through the process of embracing my pain I am growing more alive, more whole, more giving. This represents a generative process occurring within me toward myself, as well as in my relationships

with others. It represents, in the context of this project, a sort of fathering of myself in a way I've needed to experience such fathering.

Actually there are plenty of good reasons not to write about issues related to being a father and a man in today's world. It is risky to do so. For one thing, there is no unanimity with regard to fatherhood or the father wound within the men's movement(s). Talking and writing about men's issues opens one to being misunderstood from all sides. Some men will be threatened in discovering that masculinity has various definitions and that fatherhood increasingly is expressed in other than traditional ways. It forces them to choose whether to listen to other views or to defend themselves and their hard-earned sense of manhood.

Writing about men's issues is also risky because it touches at the core of my experience as a man in relation with women. Some women may wonder why men can't just grow up and put past hurts behind them. Of course, it may be these same women who send mixed messages about what they expect from men: toughness, gentleness, hard work, family commitment, strength of body, softness of heart, "a man's man" (whatever the hell that means), and also emotionally available.

I have benefitted greatly by studying feminism. I have been privileged not only to hear and reflect on the

many voices of women's experience but encouraged to explore the meanings and implications these hold for me and other men. I have taken to heart the relational and experiential dimensions of much of the psychological, theological, and spiritual writings by women. At the same time, I have found myself feeling somewhat guilty simply for being a man. There is, of course, good reason for the healthy guilt men feel in relation to the dominating position they still hold in society, and the injustices many women experience firsthand. The suggestion that all men are equally complicit in keeping it this way, however, is not true and is an injustice to men who desire partnership rather than domination.

While I have grown in my respect for women who are struggling to be heard in this world, I can never fully understand what life is like for them as women. Women's experience is different than mine. In like manner, I don't believe that women can ever fully understand the experience of men, even if it is accepted that gender is a socially constructed reality. Empathy brings us partway--even a long way--in meeting and appreciating one another, but there remains a gap in understanding that is difficult to bridge. Gender arrangements in our society leave women and men alike with difficult choices about how to live their lives and raise their children.

Another reason against writing on this subject is that

it may open me to severe criticism in the halls of academia. The way I wish to write this project may fall short of the scholarship that is expected. It may not be sufficiently backed up with the citations of experts, in no small measure because there are no experts. Each man is the expert on his own experience of growing up male. At the same time, I realize that I may not always see myself or the dynamics that have been at work throughout my life accurately. When other men share their experiences and feelings these sometimes resonate with my own. There is a sense of shared experience I have with other men when the defensive walls built by fear and social convention come tumbling down.

All this talk about experience and feeling, however, is somewhat suspect in major portions of the academic community, as seen in their reliance almost solely on empirical research methods. The exceptions in my experience have been in classes dealing specifically with feminist psychology, theology and spirituality. In these settings the experiential and relational dimensions of life and ways of knowing have been honored alongside other approaches. The concerns I have been expressing here about whether my approach to understanding certain issues in men's lives will be heard or dismissed may in fact be related to the manner in which feminist scholarly approaches in general have been misrepresented and

challenged by entrenched traditionalists.

While I have researched this topic primarily through books, it has always been with an eye toward what it might tell me about my own experience of being a man and a father. It has been a quite personal search. I have relied more on feeling, intuition, and observation than on intellect and rationality. Doing so in itself is a risk, for at least the male world I grew up to embrace was one confined by intellect and rationality, giving only secondary importance to other ways of knowing and experiencing one's world.

The most compelling reason against writing this project is that the wounds are still open. I have come a long way in understanding and valuing my life's experiences and relationships. In some respects though, the tasks involved in reaching toward self-understanding and acceptance as a man can never be fully completed. The journey is for a lifetime.

Several years ago my father and I exchanged letters through which we each tried in the best way we could to express the depth of our feeling toward one another. The dominant emotions for me at the time were hurt, anger, and disappointment. My father, for his part, was continuing to carry feelings of rejection and failure. Neither of us knew the steps in the delicate and awkward dance we were attempting. We stumbled around for words, as we still do,

to express ourselves.

As a result of these mutual efforts I feel as though I know my father a little better. The lostness I felt as a boy was not unlike that of my father's at a similar age. A connection was begun in that correspondence because my father became less idealized in my eyes and more human, a redemptive move in itself. I saw once again that some family emotional forces are carried forward in time within persons and get replayed in spite of efforts to the contrary. The journey perhaps is for even more than a lifetime. For family exists across the generations, and even when a family member dies, his or her presence may still be felt in the interactions that take place in those who follow.

I am writing this project because I need to speak the truth about myself as a son, as a father, and as a man, in order to bring some healing to bear in my life and in my relationships. It is interesting to me how my academic interests these past few years since the birth of my first child have returned whenever possible to matters of the family and relationships. In this way my personal life has intersected and overlapped with my academic work, and I have found some support and encouragement in the academic community to address my interests and concerns. Only in this way have I been able to keep the fabric of my life from tearing.

I don't pretend that this project will be widely read. My only hope is that in the writing of it I will learn more about working with other men, particularly those who are involved in the joys and demands of fathering, and that by getting further in touch with my own feelings about my place in my families I will be a good enough father to my children, an equal partner with my wife, and will be in a position to help others with whom I share the bonds of friendship and trust.

It should be clear to the reader by now that this work is neither a how-to manual or a scholarly treatise. Rather, it reflects the intersecting of ideas about emotional healing, relationships, gender, storytelling, group work, as these relate to fathercare. These are looked at in the light of self-in-relation theory, particularly the idea of mutual empathy, and my own religious, spiritual, and theological sensitivities. This project is intended to be experiential, relational, and a means toward the healing of men in community. It is grounded in experience, largely my own, but also that of other men whose experience touches upon my writing at certain points. Both the theory and group model are intentionally relational with regard to men's family-of-origin issues and the struggle for intimacy in men's relationships with women, children, and other men.

An important component to this project is the use of

stories. There are fairy tales, myths, and poems which speak deeply to the core of men's experiences as fathers, husbands and friends. Some are ancient and others are contemporary. Some are fantastic and others are ordinary. Some are eloquent and others are rough. Still, I believe that stories have a unique way of putting us in touch with our deeper selves. When we risk telling our own stories, as I will be doing, and as I will be inviting others to do, we not only gain insight into our experience, we connect with others in their pain and open the way toward relating in mutually empathic ways. Such connections are critical for men, many of whose only experiences with other men have been through competition, whether it be sports or business or some other venue.

The power-over model of relating that men learn as boys is one good reason that intimacy and friendship are so difficult for many modern men in our society. There is little room for vulnerability or risk-taking in relationships. Men are taught that success means being "on top": "on top" of your game, "on top" of the corporate ladder, "on top" of your opponent, "on top" in the game of lovemaking. In the well-worn words which ring from every coach's mouth: "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing!" This is what boys are taught and men continue to believe. It is a lose-lose proposition because it doesn't engender the sense of relatedness that feeds one's soul and

makes one whole. It is a power-over model which gets woven into one's very identity, creating both the shame of being inadequate and the shame of hurting others.

Stories help us to connect with one another and with our deeper selves. Stories draw out alternatives to the power-over model, namely, power-with or shared forms of empowering one another, and power-from-within or the discovery of inner authority for one's own life. When we have known disconnections with the ones who are most significant in our lives, our parents and families, there is a need to tell our stories in a safe place with people we trust. There is a need also to listen to the ancient wisdom and contemporary relevance of myths and stories and poems which emerge out of the experience of other men and women.

This is the spiritual and psychological basis for what we do in the group of men I've assembled. We tell our stories about growing up male, about the father wound, about our need for male mentors, about the difficulty we experience in defining and living our manhood, about the struggles in relating intimately with others, about learning to take care of ourselves, about our anger, shame, and grief, and about how vulnerable we sometimes feel. Storytelling, I contend, holds the keys to our healing and transformation as men, not because stories contain the answers to all our problems and uncertainties, but because

they provide a way of expressing and living the truth of our experience as men. Through storytelling, I believe, we discover what Jesus meant in the gospel of John: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."²

Work Previously Done in the Field

To the best of my knowledge, no one has taken an indepth look at fatherhood from a perspective at once intentionally relational and pastoral. More specifically, I have sought in this project to combine a theological orientation with self-in-relation theory. The task I have set before myself is to draw together from various sources a view of fatherhood that takes into consideration such factors as the father wound, a relational theory of psychological development and health, male spirituality, mutual empathy, and storytelling. It is my hope that the ideas represented in each of these factors are compatible and mutually reinforcing and lead to an understanding of fathercare that is deeply relational, nurturing of children and father alike, concerned with developing a partnership model for parenting, and mutually empathic in quality.

The men's movement in the United States and beyond has spawned many local and regional men's groups, retreats, and associations for working with men's issues. These groups have dealt with the father wound in some depth, as well as numerous other issues men face in their lives, including

² John 8:32, NRSV.

fathering. Much has been written in recent years in both journals and books about the need to heal the wounds of the absent father. Some of these include Samuel Osherson's Finding Our Fathers, John Lee's At My Father's Wedding, Guy Corneau's Absent Fathers. Lost Sons, and Gregory Vogt and Stephen Sirridge's Like Son. Like Father.³

Other researchers have written about the changing and emerging roles of fathers in caring for their children, represented in such edited compilations as Men's Transitions to Parenthood, Fathers and Their Families, Father and Child, Men in Families, Dimensions of Fatherhood, The Father's Role, and Fatherhood Today.⁴

³ See Samuel Osherson, Finding Our Fathers: How a Man's Life is Shaped by His Relationship with His Father (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1986); John Lee, At My Father's Wedding: Reclaiming Our True Masculinity (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); Guy Corneau, Absent Fathers. Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity, trans. Larry Shouldice (Boston: Shambhala, 1991); and Gregory Max Vogt and Stephen T. Sirridge, Like Son. Like Father: Healing the Father-Son Wound in Men's Lives (New York: Plenum Press, 1991).

⁴ See Phyllis W. Berman and Frank A. Pedersen, eds., Men's Transitions to Parenthood: Longitudinal Studies of Early Family Experience (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assocs., 1987); Stanley H. Cath, Alan Gurwitt and Linda Gunsberg, eds., Fathers and Their Families (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1989); Stanley H. Cath, Alan R. Gurwitt and John Munder Ross, eds., Father and Child: Developmental and Clinical Perspectives (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982); Robert A. Lewis and Robert E. Salt, eds., Men in Families (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1986); Shirley M. H. Hanson and Frederick W. Bozett, eds., Dimensions of Fatherhood (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985); Michael E. Lamb, The Father's Role: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assocs., 1987); and Phyllis Bronstein and Carolyn Pape Cowan, eds., Fatherhood Today: Men's Changing Roles in the Family (New

These tend to represent the latest research on what sort of involvement fathers are typically practicing in their own families and how such involvement is changing with increasing numbers of two-career families, families affected by divorce, or blended families. Recent popular writing on the new fatherhood has been done by such authors as Richard Louv, a syndicated columnist, and Jerrold Lee Shapiro.⁵

At the same time, some very interesting work in early childhood development has been done in the last decade to add some new understandings to the work of such scholars as D. W. Winnicott, Margaret Mahler, and Bruno Bettelheim. Daniel N. Stern has written The Interpersonal World of the Infant, in which he proposes that an infant experiences a self relating to others at a much earlier moment than previously thought.⁶ The self-in-relation theorists of the Stone Center at Wellesley College recognize in this the beginning of the lifelong human effort to make connections with other persons and the need for such connections for the healthy psychological development of individuals. Thus

⁵ See Richard Louv, FatherLove: What We Need, What We Seek, What We Must Create (New York: Simon & Schuster, Pocket Books, 1993); and Jerrold Lee Shapiro, The Measure of a Man: Becoming the Father You Wish Your Father Had Been (New York: Delacorte Press, 1993).

⁶ Daniel N. Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

human development needs to be viewed from the perspective of not only separation and individuation, but also attachment and relational connections.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project focuses primarily on the design, implementation, and evaluation of a group experience for men who are, or hope to be, fathers. It deals with naming the father wound in men's experience--a wound, resulting from relationships with fathers and other men established in disconnection and competition, which then gets played out in experiences of shame, grief, anger and too often violence. Male models of power contained within traditional myths of masculinity contribute to the disconnections with which men struggle. The impact of these upon men's relationships are discussed.

In 1993, I gathered a group of men for the purpose of exploring these issues. The invitation to be involved in this group was extended through area churches and the news media. Through story, poetry and personal sharing, participants were encouraged to begin the process of healing the father wound in their lives and to explore more involved and nurturing forms of fathercare with their children. As facilitator I sought to direct the group process in a manner that would build a supportive sense of community for the sharing of personal stories on an emotional level. I also sought to draw out the broader

social implications of what we were talking about--both in terms of being fathers and of creating new understandings of what it means to be male.

The project focuses especially upon the implications of the self-in-relation theory for working with men. In particular, the definitions of mutuality and empathy are applied to the art of fathercare, and the applicability to men's groups of the healing factors of the relational approach are considered. My use of the self-in-relation theory of women's psychological development, and not other psychological theories, represents an intentional choice toward seeking healing in a relational context. Specifically, the concepts of connection, disconnection, violation, empathy, mutuality, relationship and self-empathy are applied to work with men in their development as human beings and as fathers.

Equally important are the concepts of emotional healing and spiritual wholeness which are woven into the writing of this project and into my facilitation of the group. This is perhaps where the overlapping of theological and psychological concepts occurs most explicitly and the relational quality of the underlying religio-spiritual vision of the project is most apparent. Persons seldom find healing in isolation. In fact, the isolation itself, so prevalent a characteristic of men's lives, is usually what causes the pain in the first place.

The project does not deal explicitly with the men's movement, except to acknowledge that the use of storytelling is a sign of indebtedness to Robert Bly, Michael Meade, and others in the mythopoetic arm of the men's movement. The project does not deal with the technical art of storytelling. Rather, it begins with the belief that stories offer doors for men to enter their inner worlds of creativity, emotions and intuition, leaving behind the analytical part of themselves for a period of time.

I critique the men's movement in light of pastoral considerations as well as feminist critiques. At the same time, I realize that my social location is representative of many men within the men's movement. I am white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male: all the marks of privileged social standing in an imperfect and discriminatory world. That this limits my perspective is evident to me in the intense struggle I experienced in seeing the broader social and political implications of my search for emotional and spiritual healing. My consciousness is being raised with regard to the truth that stories and theories and movements are not neutral in their effects upon people.

The project presents a male spirituality growing out of my pastoral concerns for working with fathers as a way of healing family and marriage relationships and thus contributing to the healing of the world. This theological

and pastoral foundation addresses the needs and struggles men experience in their primary relationships within human families. Self-in-relation theory is proposed as a bridge toward understanding psychological development in men and their subsequent ability to be emotionally involved fathers with their children.

CHAPTER 2

Toward Healing the Father Wound Within Men

I begin this chapter by naming my own father wound as a prelude to addressing some common themes of woundedness which I believe run through many men's lives. My main concern in relation to this project is to identify the wounding which occurs in the absence of meaningful father-son relationships, although certainly this is not the only relationship in which boys are wounded. I speak of the emotional disconnectedness between father and son, and how this is manifested in the way boys and men are disconnected from their own inner, emotional lives. Many factors enter into this wounding, including social gender conditioning, changing cultural expectations of fatherhood, and emotional dynamics across the generations.

Michael Meade uses the words "isolation" and "exile" to portray the losses men experience in relation to the absent or neglectful father.

Isolation has become a common experience. I often think of it as exile. Sons feel exiled from their fathers, father feels exiled from their sons. It's as if there were huge chasms between them reinforced by sex roles. The father is supposed to act like a father, the son is supposed to act like a son. Sometimes, when people try to conform to those behaviors, the interactions get lost altogether.¹

Men, who as boys growing up, experienced their own fathers

¹ Michael Meade, "Lamenting the Loss of Male Spirit," in To Be A Man: In Search of the Deep Masculine, ed. Keith Thompson (New York: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1991), 80.

as absent, abusive, neglectful, or passive, are more likely to bear the scars of the wounded father within their souls. In this way the father-son relationship, whether it is a healthy one or not, is formational of a man's own self-image as he enters into fatherhood. Men whose fathers did not provide a model of involved and nurturing fatherhood often "don't know what is behind their shame, loneliness, and despair, their desperate search for love, for affirmation, and for structure, their frantic tendency to compete over just about anything with just about anybody."² If they do begin to recognize the connection between these feelings and behaviors and their experience of the missing father they may still be at a loss as to how to deal with the pain and begin anew.

In this chapter I address the specific nature of the woundedness many men feel, by discussing the dynamics of shame, grief, and anger in men's lives. These appear to be recurrent themes in much of the current literature on men's issues. Left unexamined, these inner dynamics find expression of unhealthy addictions, shallow relationships, self-destructive behavior, and abusive violence. I consider shame, grief, and anger, through the lens of the father-son relationship, not because these emotional dynamics are solely located in this relationship, but

² Frank S. Pittman III, Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1993), 20.

because how a man feels toward his own father has a bearing on how he feels about himself as a father.

The term "relationship" is somewhat of a misnomer for the tenuousness and lack of warmth which often characterize the interaction between fathers and sons. What goes on between sons and their fathers is often anything but relational in the way I wish to use this term, which is precisely the problem. The sense of woundedness emerges from the absence of meaningful relationship with the father. On the other hand, one of the mythic stories of our cultural heritage, Homer's Odyssey, "teaches us that the experience of father includes his absence and the longing for his return."³ If this is so, it offers hope that the father might be restored to his place in the family and in the emotional lives of men who are seeking to recover the lost father.

Naming a Man's Wound

At the age of thirty I wrote my father a letter expressing some of the depth of feeling I had in relation to him. The letter read in part:

Dear Dad,

It has taken me years to write this letter. I've put it off. I've buried my needs. I've rationalized. But being in an adult world now, I can't keep doing these things.... I sense that I am shutting people out of my life with my self-

³ Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 34.

protective and insecure exterior. . . . I need to break out of the confining walls I've built around myself.

I've had strong feelings about you for a long time. . . . I've wanted to speak directly with you, to tell you about my feelings and my needs, but I haven't had the courage even when opportunities were there. I'm not sure about the basis for my fears, except that I didn't want to look foolish or immature. Also, I was afraid of being rejected.

I admit, Dad, that I don't understand you very well. I see in you a man who builds better walls than I do, who manages to look the part of the successful professional, while keeping your distance from everyone, including your family. Yet you don't seem to believe that anyone can help you, or that there's anything to be done to improve the relationships that you have.

I don't pretend to know what's happening between you and Mom. Neither am I interested in taking sides. . . . I don't want to lose either one of you. . . .

I have found myself pitying my mother and fearing my father. I have found myself loving my mother with the kind of compassion one feels for the wounded. I have found myself loving my father with the kind of admiration one feels for a hero, even a hero one can never meet or touch. . . . I have wanted desperately to be more like you and despised the very thought a moment later. I have wept more than once because I didn't know my father. . . .

Here I am, a man of 30 with a boy inside crying for his father. This boy has known his mother. She has fed him and clothed him. She has not asked for much in return, as she's not accustomed to asking. She has been selfless with her children, and in fact, has given most of herself away at her own expense. She has given to this boy the toil of her hands, the dull ache in her back, and all that she had to give. Yet she was unable to give that which was needed most by a growing boy--the emotional warmth and security that keeps a soul from starving. She didn't have it to give because she didn't possess it herself.

This boy inside the man has never known his father. For whatever reason the two of them have never really connected. His father, too, has cared for the boy and protected him. He too has given himself for his children and saw that they had the good things of life--a comfortable place to live, food on the table, and opportunity. He provided for his family what they needed and didn't ask anything in return. I wish he had asked, because that boy would have given him anything. His was a sense of duty and loyalty toward his family. But he too was unable to respond to the emotional needs that were there. . . .

I think of you often, dad. I wish that we were in touch more often than we are. I don't like not knowing how you're doing. If I am to be honest though, I really need much more than just more communication. I need to get to know you. I need especially to be accepted by you. . . .

I am responsible for my own feelings, that much I know. I am not writing about these feelings to hurt you. Just the opposite. I'd like to open the door for a new beginning in our relationship. I admire you in many ways, something I haven't been able to tell you before. I also need you. I need you to tell me how I'm doing, to give me a little guidance, to support me--all things I suspect you'd like to do but haven't known how.

I hope this letter makes it to the mailbox. It's the most difficult thing I've done in a long time. I have feared that it might backfire--that it might hurt my chances of receiving the very affirmation I am seeking. . . . I feel very much like a child sometimes, and then I realize that in many ways I am a child emotionally, still looking for a sense of security that allows a person to explore and discover who they are in God's world. I have to take a risk, and I'm aware that it will probably lead to more risk-taking, for which I am both frightened and grateful.

Love, Mark⁴

⁴ Mark L. Richardson, letter to Lloyd M. Richardson, 21 July 1987.

Now over six years later, these words have taken on new meaning. The nature of my relationship with my father has not changed dramatically in that time, but I have changed. When I wrote this letter I was holding out hope that the relationship between us could somehow be different, perhaps deeper and richer in its emotional tone. In fact, we have had moments when we have drawn closer to one another. More importantly though, I am beginning to see my father in a different light. I see the hurt little boy in him who feels abandoned by his minister father who is busy "tending the sheep" and his mother whose moralistic religion allows little room for the free expression of normal childhood emotions. Like many men, my father has "unresolved hurt feelings from his own childhood," and "lives with a hurt little boy within himself, one that is always ready to be rejected, and this makes [him] oversensitive to what he perceives as rejection."⁵

⁵ John A. Sanford and George Lough, What Men Are Like (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 194. In fact, one reason that my father didn't open and respond to my letter to him when he got it was, in his own words, that he "did not feel up to handling rejection and made the assumption that was the content focus." He mentioned his feelings of rejection in two other contexts in his return letter to me. One was in relation to his childhood relationship with his mother with whom he "could not express feelings easily because they were usually rejected in some simplistic way with spiritual overtones and justification." The other was in relation to his retreat into himself during my adolescent years because his marriage with my mother was causing him great pain and difficulty. He explained: "If I retreated away from you more during that period it was that subconsciously I felt that you were rejecting me because I

I had always wanted my father to tell me more of his story so that I might better understand him. I suspect now that it may have been too painful for him and he learned to keep silent in the face of it. This is not unlike what I have done for years, refusing to name the pain I was experiencing. Like father, like son. The words of Sy SaFransky speak eloquently about the generational framework within which men's woundedness may be most clearly seen.

We were all wounded in some way by our parents; not because they were evil, or wished us harm, but because they too were wounded, like their parents before them.... Thus the pain echoes sorrowfully, from generation to generation--while we, yearning desperately for our own measure of happiness, discover no amount of food will fill our emptiness, no lover will banish the memory of a mother's absence or a father's scorn.⁶

In his response to my letter, my father did convey how desperately he had wanted to get close to me as I was growing up. He confessed that he had missed that kind of support and encouragement from his parents when he was young, and as a result he too felt cheated. He confided, "I grew up a very private person, taught not to express feelings, or to 'act out' normal expressions of maturation or emotion. I always vowed that my children would have a

could not make everything right for/with your mother, and because I had limited ability and desire to cope and accomodate." So rejection can be a theme in a man's life which plays itself out in one relationship after another.

⁶ See Robert S. Pasick, Awakening From the Deep Sleep: A Powerful Guide for Courageous Men (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 176.

sympathetic ear, an understanding parent, to whom they could turn in times of uncertainty, or of joy."⁷

In my father's view, I believe, external circumstances conspired against him so that he was unable to fulfill this vow. Now I am able to see some of these circumstances--work demands, pressures to succeed, a failing marriage, the absence of friendship's emotional support, and some unresolved childhood issues--more realistically. It was difficult at best for my father to know what to do with a son. To a boy who is struggling to find his way, however, there are always choices to be made. When the father chooses to involve himself in other matters to the neglect of his own son, the son "develops what Robert Bly calls 'a hole in the soul.'"⁸

Nevertheless, the above letter marked the first time I had been so honest with my father about the pain I had been experiencing. I had internalized certain messages in childhood, one of which was that dad's word was not to be questioned or his power confronted. This letter represented a move away from such dictates, which I had always believed carried dire consequences if not followed. Part of my fear in sending the letter was that my father might get angry with me for showing disrespect. Another

⁷ Lloyd M. Richardson, letter to author, 22 November 1987.

⁸ Marvin Allen, with Jo Robinson, In the Company of Men: A New Approach to Healing for Husbands, Fathers, and Friends (New York: Random House, 1993), 69.

fear was that he might see me as less of a man in comparison to himself since I was unable to "handle my problems" internally. In the letter I was venturing into the unpredictable world of emotions, a world largely untapped by either of us, and was insisting on naming my wound. As a result of our interchange, I realize now that my wound is not so unlike the wound of my father.

I wrote the following piece as I struggled to come to terms with my changing image of my father. In it I am recognizing some of the connections between my father and myself, in particular the demons of inadequacy and shame with which we have both wrestled.

My Father, My Self

Years I've struggled to come to terms
 with the image of my father in me.
 Not only the transient qualities or relative
 values, but rather the core of the man:
 One who searches relentlessly for a place of
 beauty,
 One who yearns stubbornly for a more lasting
 peace,
 One who seeks compassion in his world which
 knows far too much pain,
 One who wrestles with the unanswerable without
 fear of being seduced by its charm,
 One who hopes for a better day.

Some look at me and volunteer that I look
 more like my father each day.
 Some see his mannerisms or hear something of his
 voice in mine.
 He and I share a place in the middle, too:
 the middle child of three, and
 a son who is father to a son.

More significant than any of this though,
 is my newly acquired awareness of a spiritual
 connection, a sense that perhaps his journey is
 also mine.

No one can be expected to understand this
 connection, nor do I.
 This is as it must be.
 There is no different way.

The trouble with being honest in all my feelings
 about my father is that in the empathic
 moments they all come right back around and
 confront me with the bare truth about myself.

The anger, when I dare to face it,
 tells me as much about myself as about my
 father.

My own anger frightens me sometimes,
 as did my father's when I was a boy.
 It is intense and not always directed where it
 belongs.

How far back, then, must one go, and where must
 one look to find the family culprits who
 say, "You're not worth a damn?"
 These voices, I can't quite make them out,
 taunt me with their cruel accusations.
 I want to confront these devious, resentful
 naysayers and put an end to the cycle of pain
 once and for all.

It may not be murder I'm after, though.
 Rather a profound embrace of a side of myself,
 a side of my father,
 that I haven't dared to face.
 It's hard to say with whom I am dealing.

Healing the father wound is a difficult and painful
 process for many men. It involves several steps. First,
 it involves resurrecting long buried feelings about the
 father who was demanding, withdrawn, or preoccupied. These
 feelings, which have been secretly hidden from view, need
 to be consciously brought to awareness in the present
 moment. Second, it involves taking responsibility for
 feelings of shame, grief, and anger, even though these are
 related to the fact that Dad was not there for his son when
 he was needed. By taking responsibility for feelings

toward his father, a son avoids getting stuck in blame, and is able to decide how to proceed through the feelings. Third, it involves confronting the idealized images of father which emerge because a boy knows so little about his real father. These images need to be reevaluated in a more realistic light.

It is tempting for a son to assume that there is either something wrong with his father or something wrong with himself in order for such a failure of connection to arise and then persist. There is a sense of shame inherent in the very woundedness that men sometimes carry within them from childhood.

What goes on between the father and son, and what does not go on between them, is surely the most important determinant of whether the boy will become a man capable of giving life to others, or whether he will go through life ashamed and pulling back from exposure to intimacy with men, women, and children.⁹

The stakes are high in the healing of men's father wounds. Intimate and life-giving relationships with their children, and with other men and women, depends in part upon the care with which men attend to the dynamic of shame in their lives and to the healing process.

A fourth step involves developing the capacity to express a full range of emotions. This is important not only for enhancing the quality of life for individual men, but the quality of all of his relationships. The social

⁹ Pittman, Man Enough, 142.

implications related to men's learned denial of emotional expression revolve around the way in which men's anger often results in violent outbursts and otherwise aggressive or destructive behavior directed toward others or himself. By restricting the expression of a full range of emotions in their lives, men are adopting the traditional images of masculinity as invulnerable and powerful, which are conveyed by such influential social forces as the military, the popular media, the contemporary family, pornography, competitive sports, and various male peer groups which a boy encounters while growing up.¹⁰

An overwhelming majority of male spheres of activity do not encourage talking about one's feelings, acknowledging tenderness or vulnerability, or giving up control over people and situations. To open up and admit one's humanness within a traditional male value system is tantamount to admitting failure--not a highly respected quality among many men. But this role-playing is not done without cause. Men restrict the full range of human emotions in order to maintain their power over others or

¹⁰ See Chapter 3, "Why Are Men Violent?," in Ron Thorne-Finch, Ending the Silence: The Origins and Treatment of Male Violence Against Women (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), for a discussion of the link between the social construction of male violence and men's responsibility for their own violent behavior and the social structures that legitimize it. While his book specifically addresses male violence against women, much of the research presented has broader implications about male violence. He argues, and I agree, that "we need to recognize that our society is divided by other issues as well as that of gender; these include class, race, age, sexual preference, and able-bodiedness" (p. 53). Male violence is done within a social context which promotes male mastery and control of their environment, and boys are socialized to claim and exert this male prerogative of power over others.

to perpetuate the illusion of being in control of themselves.¹¹

Many fathers and sons, and men in general, have not learned to use the language of emotions with one another, and are forced to fall back on traditionally masculine means for seeking to make connection (shared interests in sports, cars, tools) which seldom have the desired effect. These shared pursuits may produce competency in certain areas, and they may assist in developing the context for a relationship, but alone they cannot produce the much needed bond of intimacy and trust. Instead, competitiveness replaces intimacy as the mode of relating and means toward personal power.

In the following poem, I speak of the pain I carried into my adult life from a childhood marked by the physical and emotional absence of my father. Absence--an absence of attention, affection, or emotional support--is actually a tangibly felt presence which marks a person on the inside. The absence of my father during my adolescent years created a hole in my world. I felt it in my body through stomach- and head-aches. I ate what was put before me, but I had lost my taste for food along with my taste for life.

Such neglect in a boy's life causes a wound which seems terribly transparent to the wounded one, as though it were broadcasting to all he encounters, "This person is not

¹¹ Ibid., 107.

worthy of your attention." It is a wound which communicates inferiority and a diminished sense of self. Absence of his father creates a double bind: the boy who is neglected believes there is something about him that is unacceptable and needs to be changed, and yet no amount of accomodating to the perceived expectations of others has the desired effect of increasing the attention received.

This poem reflects my feeling remembrance of what it was like to grow up in my family.

it is strange to think
a childhood so uneventful
so "normal"
should evoke such strong feeling
and demand such work to understand

i am a middle child
the "lost" and "forgotten" child
spending lonely afternoons on the couch
even then seeking escape
from the very real pain of loneliness

no one knows the depth
nor is there anyone seemingly to care
that a boy
a frightened, self-conscious boy
is losing his way

mother is deep in despair
father's work consumes his time
sisters have their own lives
so the boy is on his own
always on his own

is there no one?
honestly, is this how it is meant to be?
do children just grow up effortlessly,
with no investment of time,
no emotional energy?

is everyone blind?
does no one see?
i can hardly believe the goddamned emptiness
of this place

some dare to call home

look at me
damn you
look
at me!

do i have to achieve something?
just tell me
i'll do it
or god knows i'll try.

please, let me in
don't shut me out of your world
don't leave me to be alone
just see me
acknowledge me
value me
love me if you can
but please, whatever you do,
try not to lose me
i'm not sure i can make it without you
i'm not at all sure

years later
i sit wondering
what is beneath all of this
and how did i get here

love was lost
somewhere
i was not worthy
somehow
i don't know why

The sense of lostness and loneliness expressed in this poem was compounded because my emotional needs were being neglected by the ones whose attention I most desired: my parents. I felt deep in my bones that I was either unlovable in my very makeup, uninteresting, or that I had done something to cause my parents to be displeased with me. I resolved to work harder at being a "good boy," not to cause problems, and to help my parents in whatever ways I could. To me this meant not balking when my turn to do

the dishes or vacuuming came up, completing my homework, earning good grades, and generally being seen but not heard. I believed there was something I needed to do in order to get the attention I craved, but I didn't know what it was.

Love may not be the best word to describe that for which I was longing. I wanted to feel valued. I wanted my feelings to be acknowledged as important. I wanted to see the pride my parents felt at having me as a son. I craved this more from my father, perhaps because I thought I needed him to show me the way to manhood. I felt very uncertain about my ability to find my way in the world, and I had no one with whom I could talk openly about my questions and concerns.

So far I have been telling my own story with a view toward better understanding the nature and quality of the woundedness many other men also feel, woundedness that is sometimes caused by dysfunctional family emotional processes. The wound created by the absent father may lead to a sense of loneliness and isolation in a growing boy's experience, much as they did with me. Clearly, however, there are other factors as well, such as the culturally-bound gender expectations which vary across time and from place to place.

Rigidly defined understandings of masculinity can create difficulties for boys who have an awareness of

feelings--theirs and others--but little encouragement to express them. My father never asked me about my feelings or shared his own. Such talk was not a part of his understanding of what a boy needed within the cultural context in which our family lived. Yet he also assumed that because I said nothing about feelings of loneliness or sadness, I was okay. I do not think such neglect of the emotional lives of boys is unusual in American culture. In contrast, the emotional development of girls is enhanced by the support they usually receive from other girls through talking.

What has been said thus far points out the importance of such parental tasks as validation, confidence-building, listening, and attentiveness to children's feeling-states. These are all acts of parental initiative requiring empathic attunement to the needs of one's children. The point of this project is that a boy needs to experience empathy from not only his mother, if indeed this is true for him, but also from his father. As will be discussed in the next chapter, if a boy's relationship with his father is characterized by empathy and a growing sense of mutuality, he will not only feel better about himself, but will have a model for mutually empathic and empowering relationships that is more clearly tied to his emerging sense of masculinity.

Shame and the Father Wound

One of the most frequently discussed issues in the literature of the men's movement is shame. In Facing Shame, authors Fossum and Mason talk of the "let's pretend" quality of the seemingly well-functioning, "high-achieving family."¹² When persons live in such a "fairytale family," they pledge loyalty to the family dynamics and secrets which keep the family persona intact before others. Other families in the community sometimes envy such families for their apparent tranquility and lack of conflict. Yet when members of the "fairytale family" allow themselves to reflect upon their lives they realize that they are living a sort of lie. They are not, however, to tell anyone outside the family just how lonely and empty they feel. This would be seen as a betrayal of their family, and others are often not willing to allow persons from high-achieving families to shatter the illusion by voicing their pain. Therefore, the shame-bound system of the family must be maintained, by having "parents exert control over the children to achieve, to conform, to pretend, too."¹³ Denial is an essential element built into the shame-bound family system, a system which is easily passed from one generation to the next.

¹² Merle A. Fossum and Marilyn J. Mason, Facing Shame: Families In Recovery (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 38.

¹³ Ibid., 53.

A similar "let's pretend" quality may exist in the relationship between father and son. A father may believe that in order to toughen up his son for life in the real world he needs to treat his son like a miniature man. In my father's response to my letter, he wrote of how in our occasional backyard basketball games and other competitive activities he was "trying to impart in some distorted way . . . the uncompromising drive to achieve and excel."¹⁴ Aside from the fact that this truly reflects a value he has embraced in his life, leading to patterns of workaholism which drain him and provide no lasting sense of meaning, it was also not what I wanted. I pretended to be happy with whatever contact he offered me because I assumed that he knew what was best for me. I did not have enough inner strength to simply say I wanted something different, so I continued to pretend that everything was okay--that I was okay. I do not remember him ever asking.

Shame, writes Samuel Osherson in his book Wrestling With Love, "means the failure to live up to one's inner ideals." This failure may relate to work patterns and the inability to accomplish all that one sets out to do. But it also relates to other ideals, having to do with a man's marriage, family, friendships, and social standing. It means that in a man's personal sense of identity he is never really good enough and must continually strive to

¹⁴ Lloyd M. Richardson, letter to author, 22 November 1987.

improve his performance if he ever wishes to be acceptable to himself or others.

Osherson speaks of three levels of shame at work in people's lives. There is "primary shame," which might be defined as the "initial, usually childhood, feeling of inadequacy." "Secondary shame" refers to "the pockets of embarrassment and humiliation from the past that we reexperience as adults." This level of shame may be activated in a man at times when he must ask for help. Then there is "tertiary shame," which is defined as "the embarrassment of feeling seen or exposed or reminded of our inadequacy by the people around us."¹⁵ It is this third level of shame which is especially toxic because it cuts away at a person's self-worth in its most sensitive, vulnerable spots. For a man, the sense of inadequacy or failure is compounded by the fact that someone else is witnessing it.

Jim, a 42 year-old man, came into my office with Linda to discuss their wedding plans and begin premarital counseling (these are not their real names). They had been living together in a house he owned for a couple of years, had a nine-month-old son together, and were now in a transition to a new community, a new job for him, and a new home. They had, in their own words, a "rocky"

¹⁵ Samuel Osherson, Wrestling With Love: How Men Struggle With Intimacy (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 33-34.

relationship from the start, and I assessed that there was still reason for concern because of some of the reactive patterns of communication which operated between them.

There are topics I usually discuss with people as they prepare for marriage, and as I proceeded through these Jim became visibly uncomfortable. When I asked him if something was wrong, he shrugged and said that he hadn't anticipated questions on matters such as money and family relationships. When it came time to discuss how they planned to go about making decisions in their marriage, I suggested that because they had recently purchased a home, we take that as an example of making decisions. On the surface it appeared that they had looked around and selected a particular house together. But then Linda revealed that she had really had her heart set on another house and that Jim had not offered the seller enough. Jim defended himself, saying that she didn't understand what their financial situation was.

I was taken off guard, since my impression before I brought it up was that this had been a mutual decision, not one fraught with emotional baggage. Linda voiced her feeling that Jim did not take her seriously and that she felt left out of this particular decision. Jim became increasingly defensive. I pressed him to see that I wasn't questioning the logic behind the decision. I only wanted to discuss the process by which they hoped to make

decisions in the future. My good-intentioned efforts notwithstanding, Jim felt backed into a corner with no way out, and finally blurted out angrily, "I left Linda out of the decisions about how much to offer on the other house. There, are you satisfied? I was wrong. Is that what you wanted to hear?" Jim was experiencing the third level of shame in which his shortcomings were being drawn out in the presence of others. He then got up and left the room. This incident illustrates that the raging waters of shame can run deep for some men, leaving them feeling carried away before they are able to reach safe shores.

I had some information about Jim prior to their coming in to see me, which, had I been alert, might have allowed me to proceed in a more cautious manner. He is the eldest of four sons and one daughter, but not the most successful. He had done well in sales for a number of years, allowing him to buy a home with a pool, throw parties, drive a sports car, and see a number of women. He began to drink and do some drugs. Eventually he was fired from his job and his world came tumbling down. Now he was moving back to his hometown, and was trying very hard to keep his head up. But he clearly was wrestling with the image of the man he once was. His self-esteem was still under siege because of his failure to live up to the inner ideals he had set for himself. Any hint that he may have been unfair in his relationship with his fiancée was taken as a personal

attack. He felt deeply exposed.

As already stated, shame involves the failure or inability to live up to ideals one has taken into oneself. These ideals must come from somewhere. Where do we get our messages about what it means to be male? Most men can look back over their lives and identify a number of sources for the ideal vision of manhood they have accepted as their own. It may originate from watching older male relatives, from hanging out with male peers or boys slightly older than oneself, from one's religious upbringing, from the media's portrayal of manhood, or from listening to parents' spoken and unspoken messages about masculinity.¹⁶

Teachers, ministers, counselors, and friends, all regularly communicate views, whether implicit or explicit, about what it means to be male. Longstanding cultural myths carry forward the male ideals of independence, self-sufficiency, and invulnerability, along with the expectations of competence and success at whatever one chooses to do.

So shame is a significant dynamic in the ongoing

¹⁶ As a pre-adolescent boy, my mother nicknamed me "Tough," not because I got into scrapes with other boys and won, nor because I liked to play rough. I was actually very sensitive to the feelings of others and didn't want to see anyone hurt. My mother's nickname for me inadvertently left me feeling more inadequate, because I assumed that I was not meeting her ideal image of a boy. I believed that she was trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to toughen me up, to turn me into a real boy, one who can defend himself and others. It has only been in more recent years that I have come to take comfort in an inner quality of toughness through which I am able to endure emotional turmoil.

process of human development, and in the emotional lives of men. Shame originates interpersonally, in the significant relationships of life, in particular the relationship between parent and child.¹⁷ While some shame is necessary in order for a person to forge the kinds of inner resources to effectively deal with future experiences of shame--experiences which eventually visit all people--the painfulness of shame lies in the fact that it is the result of a temporarily or permanently fractured relationship. The absence of fathers is a case in point.

Absent fathers can bring shame on us. . . . When our competition for attention is another sibling or mother we can deal with them head-on. But when it is work that takes him away, it seems that something that we cannot see, understand, or fight with is winning his attention. If we were just a bit better perhaps we could win his attention; since we can't there must be something wrong with us.¹⁸

"When a boy doesn't get enough consistent, usable love from his father for whatever reason, . . . he feels inadequate. He doesn't blame his dad for neglecting him; he blames himself for failing to be worthy of his dad's attention."¹⁹

Underlying what is being said about fathers' contributions to their sons' sense of shame and inadequacy,

¹⁷ Gershen Kaufman, Shame: The Power of Caring, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing, 1985), 7.

¹⁸ Christian F. Poulson II, "Men, Work, and Shame," paper delivered at the Third Annual Northern California Professional Conference on New Directions in Male Psychology, Santa Rosa, Calif., 16 May 1993, 2.

¹⁹ Allen, 69.

is the belief that fathers are important in providing a basis for the formation of identity in boys. Joseph Nowinski speaks of identity formation and self-esteem together, distinguishing "positional identity," which is conditioned upon performing successfully in various tasks, from "relational identity," which "is based instead on maintaining the relationship itself, in affirming the attachment that bonds two people together."²⁰ Nowinski asserts, "A boy's early relationships with significant men not only teach him the how-tos of manhood, but also establish the orientation toward self and others that he will use in building his own self-esteem."²¹

In our cultural context, boys have tended to be pushed more toward a positional orientation. If a boy is able to achieve the athletic ability, the academic performance, the toughness and the invulnerability which are often associated with masculinity, he may feel proud of his achievement. If he fails, shame will likely be the feeling he experiences. Nowinski believes that "what is most significant for men is whether, as boys, they are able to establish any degree of identity at all from a relational

²⁰ Joseph Nowinski, Hungry Hearts: On Men, Intimacy, Self-Esteem, and Addiction (New York: Lexington Books, 1993), 67-68.

²¹ Ibid., 66-67.

orientation."²² A balance between these orientations is important.

From the perspective of this project, establishing a relational orientation toward self and others in addition to the more common positional orientation, is very important in the healthy psychological development of boys. The shame of not achieving all one sets out to do is held in check when there are relational attachments within which one feels validated and valued. Other authors also point to the significance of this early failure of connection between father and son as a source of later pain and difficulty for men struggling with intimacy.

The first and earliest source of shame is the loss of the father. As young boys we feel a pull to the father, a desire to be touched, held, and contained within his psychic field. What we met more often was a wounded man unable to provide these emotional needs. When we experience a failure of bridging with the father we feel shame; what's more, we feel we are to blame for the failure.²³

In many instances then, shame results from a betrayal of trust. Children trust their parents and have certain hopes about getting their needs met. In those moments when fathers are unable to acknowledge the needs of their sons and respond empathically, whether or not they are able to meet the need, a crack in the bond of trust begins to

²² Ibid., 67.

²³ Francis Weller, "Ashamed To Be Male," in To Be a Man, ed. Keith Thompson (New York: Tarcher/ Perigee Books, 1991), 70.

develop.

According to Gershen Kaufman, in his insightful book Shame: The Power of Caring, the "root of shame lies in sudden unexpected exposure."²⁴ One cannot be prepared for such experiences, especially when they occur within the context of trusted relationships and family. Be it naivete or simply the sincere conviction that certain persons would not shame you, there is a moment of dreadful surprise when one feels exposed before others. For young children, experiences of shame, what Osherson calls "primary shame," certainly feel bad enough so that they do not wish to repeat them. On the other hand, until children develop the capacity to put their feelings related to these experiences into words, "creating meanings about the self,...shame and identity do not become linked."²⁵

Kaufman's thesis, however, is that the shame which has its roots in relationships, can later "become internalized so that the self is able to activate shame without an inducing interpersonal event."²⁶ If we relate this to men's experience, we might say that the shame becomes attached to a man's internal sense of identity, that is, who he perceives himself to be, and he finds himself sadly

²⁴ Kaufman, 11.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

lacking. He feels inadequate, as though he is a failure.²⁷ This is the most tragic consequence to the shaming done by parents with their children, which through its often subtle messages damages a young boy's life. Poulson comments,

Just the "good boy" "bad boy" terminology that seems so widespread carries an inescapable evaluation of the *child* (rather than his *behavior*) to whom it is directed. "Be a good boy" seems harmless but it suggests by its very meaning that I can also be a bad boy.²⁸

Shame, because of the way it subtly attacks a boy's internal sense of identity and self-esteem, two concepts important in understanding the nature of the human soul, may be considered "a sickness of the soul."²⁹

For men, the experience of shame stems from the denial of their own woundedness--denial which is encouraged and enhanced by traditional forms of masculinity. Being raised male can be an isolating and disconnecting experience, which in the worst of conditions leads to the learning of violence as a perverse means of retaining power and control

²⁷ A part of my father's letter to me of November 22, 1987, states, "There is another side to me that perhaps you don't understand very well and that is that I have always felt inferior. As a child, and as an adult. Sure I have succeeded in obtaining positions and titles, and, to some extent, status, but I have never been able to perform up to my expectations and standards, in any area. This leads to frustration and despair." His statements here seem to be reflective of a positional orientation, and while he doesn't use the term "shame," I believe it fairly represents the mix of feelings he is describing.

²⁸ Poulson, 1.

²⁹ Kaufman, viii.

in one's personal life. Men learn not to expose their pain, lest they be seen as being weak or a failure. Francis Weller speaks of some of the men he sees in psychotherapy in these terms,

The distressing absence of pride in these men reflects the reality that men have lost a basic sense of "ground" in which failure is tantamount to worthlessness. . . . They live according to prescription and find no meaning in their lives. These men are lonely--shame keeps them silent and prevents them from connecting with the men and women who could help heal their pain.³⁰

Thus the common wound of many men is the shame of being male, or perhaps more to the point, the shame of being raised male.

Grief and the Father Wound

A man, whose father died when he was nineteen, talks of the hole it left inside of him. "I cried and cried. It felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest. But I had to pull myself together and get to work for the sake of the family. I was angry with him. I was mad as hell that he left us like that." In fact, he postponed college and worked the family farm until his younger siblings could get through school. This sort of experience is material for grief work.

Much of the pain men experience in their lives is a form of grief over the losses, failures and disappointments which inevitably come their way. Four major areas of loss

³⁰ Weller, 69-70.

in men's lives are:

1. childhood wounds, including those experiences of shame, of rigid gender expectations, or of their father's neglect or abuse,
2. unfulfilled dreams and goals,
3. difficulty establishing intimacy in relationships with women and men, and
4. failure of empathy with their own children, namely shaming or hurting their children because of the parental scripts inside of them which often remain outside of their conscious awareness.

Each of these experiences of loss is an invitation for men to grieve. Yet often men won't allow themselves to feel the pain in a way that registers. The pain is denied, or minimized, or drowned in alcohol, or put aside, so that the day's agenda can go forward. Grieving the loss is postponed. After all, in traditional forms of masculinity, men are expected to get the job done whether or not other considerations enter the picture.

From boyhood, messages telling men to ignore the pain resound in their ears. "Big boys don't cry!" "Stop being a sissy." "That didn't hurt." "You have nothing to cry about." John Lee, writing directly to men, deals with the way these messages have played out in men's inability to grieve:

Another scene you may remember: At six you fall off your bike and cut your leg badly. You

stumble into the house, crying. The tears, the snot, and the blood get only this response from Dad: "Stop crying and tell me what happened. You're a big boy. You'll be all right. You're not that hurt. Now stop crying, damn it, or I'll really give you something to cry about." You stop. You don't cry again until you're thirty-- or at least not when anyone can see you. Sure, you may cry at sad movies under the cover of darkness. But do you ever weep for your own life, your own lost childhood? Not on your worst day, not with your best friend, certainly not in front of your wife or kids and most assuredly not in front of any man.³¹

There comes a time in a man's life when the emotional pain associated with loss needs to be brought back to conscious awareness and dealt with. Grief work needs to begin. The place to begin is suggested by what Robert Bly calls the "Road of Ashes". Men might begin by asking themselves what dreams of theirs have turned to ashes. What did they believe they could do when they were boys which has not materialized? What aspirations for the future have been left unfulfilled? While they were chasing their dreams, what parts of their lives landed in failure? These questions are not peculiar to men, only more weighted by the cultural definitions of manhood, including the illusory qualities of unlimited power and success. Failure at some task or game is tantamount to failure at one's own identification with the male world.

In addition to experiences of failure and dreams left unrealized, there is the grief associated with the absent

³¹ Lee, At My Father's Wedding, 28-29.

or abusive father. This is the grief a boy experiences when circumstances do not permit him to truly know and feel close to the central male figure in his life, his father. "Shere Hite's survey of 7,239 men revealed that 'almost no men said they had been or were close to their fathers.'"³² Osherson cites a clinical study done by psychologist Jack Sternbach with 71 of his male clients:

He found fathers were physically absent for 23 percent of the men; 29 percent had psychologically absent fathers who were too busy with work, uninterested in their sons, or passive at home; 18 percent had psychologically absent fathers who were austere, moralistic, and emotionally uninvolved; and 15 percent had fathers who were dangerous, frightening to their sons, and seemingly out of control. Only 15 percent of Sternbach's cases showed evidence of fathers appropriately involved with their sons, with a history of nurturance and trustworthy warmth and connection.³³

Since the men involved in this study represent men who were taking the initiative to be in psychotherapy, it is possible that the results of the study simply show that men who have lived with absent fathers are more likely to need therapy.

I believe, however, that the results reflect a broader social phenomenon in the lives of men who grew up with fathers who held traditional images of father as provider,

³² Shere Hite, The Hite Report on Male Sexuality (New York: Knopf, 1981), 17, cited in Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 6,7.

³³ Jack Sternbach, "The Masculinization Process," unpublished paper, RFD Box 607, Vineyard Haven, Mass. Cited in Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 7.

not father as nurturer or involved parent. These men "grew up amidst traditional sex roles in which fathers were the financial providers, while mothers were the emotional providers in the family."³⁴ It is not surprising that younger fathers today are struggling to come to terms with new expectations and images of what involved fatherhood entails.

Richard Newman, in a moving account, "Where the Pain is Buried," writes several vignettes of life as a boy. By far the briefest, yet perhaps most powerful, is

My father's promise that he would come back.
The fact that he never did.³⁵

Increasingly, this separation of boys from their fathers is a problem because of failed marriages. Physical or psychological absence remain a problem, however, in many families with fathers. The willingness to grieve over the father's absence opens the way toward other expressions of grief. The father wound is carried at the core of a man into all of his other relationships, with spouses, children, and friends. When a man allows himself to move into the grief instead of continuing to deny or suppress it, he is on the road toward the recovery of soul--the depth and breadth of who he is and who he imagines himself

³⁴ Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 8.

³⁵ Richard Newman, "Where the Pain is Buried," in Boyhood. Growing Up Male: A Multicultural Anthology, ed. Franklin Abbott (Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press, 1993), 75.

becoming--and establishing the kinds of connections which are healing and life-sustaining. Grief work potentially puts a man in touch with his own mortality, humanness, and vulnerability. When done within a trusted and trusting community, grief work may provide long overdue permission for a man to feel the pain of life's losses and defeats and to seek to learn from them about himself.

Anger and the Father Wound

Osherson speaks of the "considerable sense of loss hidden within men, having to do with their fathers," which "extends into adulthood, as many sons try to resolve their guilt, shame, and anger at their fathers in silent, hidden, ambivalent ways."³⁶ "Some men unconsciously seek better fathers at work who will forgive them and leave them feeling like a 'good son.' And, too, many sons' relationships with their fathers shape in subtle ways how they respond to their wives and children."³⁷ The need to grieve over the absent father, left unexpressed, may turn to anger. The anger potentially becomes expressed in violent ways.

Marvin Allen makes a provocative point regarding the inability of men to grieve their losses and its connection with male violence.

Society contributes to male violence in a

³⁶ Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 6, 8.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

subtler fashion by making it socially unacceptable for men to grieve. When men can't cry over a severe disappointment or loss, they have a tendency to become angry instead. At first it may be hard to understand why men resort to anger to resolve their grief, because the two emotions are entirely different. Anger hardens us and allows us to protect ourselves from harm. Grief softens us and allows us to accept the injuries we've already sustained. But when a man is not able to cry, he is filled with emotion that is looking for expression, and for some men the only feeling they can access is rage.³⁸

Thus the roots of domestic violence are to be found not only in isolated individuals but in a society in which boys and men are forced to comply with a rigid masculine code of behavior and discouraged from displaying a full range of emotions. Unless new models of manhood and fatherhood emerge, relying less on traditional images of toughness and invulnerability and more on qualities of empathy and nurturance, the cycle of violence can only continue unabated.³⁹

³⁸ Allen, 28, 29.

³⁹ Mark Gerzon, in his book A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), looks hopefully at men's changing hero images. An example of what he describes as the "hero as healer" is Tom Mossmiller, a founder of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, who was working at a shelter for battered women and children at the time the book was written. As a part of the interview, Gerzon quotes Mossmiller:

A lot of people think I work for a feminist counseling center only because I want to protect women. And I do. I do not want them to get beaten up. But I also work with abusive men because I care about them. They may not have any scars showing, but inside they're just as torn up as the women they hurt. I want to help

The anger some sons feel toward their fathers may be traced to the cultural forces which have shaped masculinity and fatherhood in America since industrialization took the father away from his home and family. Fathers became strangers in their own homes because they spent so much time working elsewhere. Their emotional connections with their families were strained beyond what was bearable. Today's consumerism means that in many households both mother and father work outside of the home and children are placed in the care of others. So some of today's children may have to deal with feelings around having two relatively absent parents rather than just one.

Anger at the realities of life are not unreasonable. Reason doesn't even enter into the equation for most children. Shame does, when parents make it clear that any expressions of anger, which usually take some disguised form in children, are unacceptable. After all, parents insist, we are doing the best we can. We are working so that you, our child, can enjoy the "good things" of life. Children, if they were able to put more precise words to their feelings, might reply to such adult reasoning that the "good thing" they want out of life is the unhurried

them get in touch with the gentle, caring, sensitive person inside them. They do not like the kind of men they have become. My commitment is to help them change. (p. 241)

Cited in Terry A. Kupers, Revisioning Men's Lives: Gender, Intimacy, and Power (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 177.

attention of their parents. So often, unfortunately, children are not given permission to express their feelings in the only ways they can--usually through some behavior which even they have trouble understanding--because parents cannot be troubled to take the time to understand. The anger then gets repressed and stored where it will later either erupt in rage or get expressed in some form of self-hatred.

Men sometimes get in touch with the hidden reserves of anger as they step into adulthood and suddenly realize that they are totally unprepared. They have not been initiated into the community of men by anyone, least of all their fathers. Some men may try the military, a fraternity, or sports, as a means of connecting with other men, hoping to learn about themselves through their associations. Some men may continue to live out the sense of masculinity they observed in their family-of-origin, perhaps in withdrawn or dominating behavior toward others. Whatever route a man takes toward masculinity is likely to fail because a welcome into the community of men cannot be forced, it must come by invitation from men who themselves have grown into an authentic sense of masculinity--one grounded in an egalitarian spirit, respect for the interconnected nature of earthly existence, and a striving after just relationships--and such men are few in the world today.

When I was seventeen years old my father and I went on

an extended bike trip that lasted ten days and covered over 550 grueling miles. At the time I was unsure of the reasons for such a trip. It seemed to me, in my critical attitude toward my father, that it was another example of his drive to achieve and reach a goal even if he couldn't see the people around him. Each day we pushed to reach our destination, anywhere from 75-115 miles per day, and yet it felt to me, and I suspect to my father as well, that we were getting nowhere. This is what he wrote to me years later:

I recognized much of what you express as the years went by. It was not so much that we grew apart, it was that we had not grown together. That was my objective in pushing for a bike trip. I honestly hoped that in that experience it would be possible to open up channels of communication. I felt it was perhaps the last opportunity to do so. To that experience I brought a lot of emotional baggage, and you brought anger and bitterness, and the barriers never came down.⁴⁰

He was right. If anything, the barriers loomed larger. Ten days of riding, eating, and sleeping in a tent together only proved, it seemed, that we had nothing of any importance to say to one another. Instead of opening communication, the experience seemed to validate the silence. There was nothing for my father to teach me because I was unwilling to learn from him. He had failed me. I had failed him.

Where, then, would the anger go? For both of us, the

⁴⁰ Lloyd M. Richardson, letter to author, 22 November 1987.

anger tended to turn inward, becoming a form of confirmation for the self-hatred we both already felt. I believe that we were so afraid of hurting, even destroying, the other that we independently concluded that the only place to direct the anger was inward. This led to depression in both of us that has been deep and severely wounding.

Only as men are able to face the anger that is harbored within themselves--in whatever forms it presents itself--can they move toward healing. Anger is a part of the underside of what it means to be a man today. This is not to say that anger is either negative or positive in its basic quality. It is true, however, that in the religious traditions in which many of us grew up, anger was seldom owned or valued as an emotion which has something to teach us about ourselves, others, or the nature of authentic relating. Nor was it seen as necessary in the process of individuation or the establishment of boundaries so important to healthy psychological functioning. Niceness, politeness, and kindness won out in the battle for our loyalties as Christians. This was the message of Church School--that God wants us to be good little boys and girls --a form of forced behavioral compliance to someone else's moral and spiritual ideal, not that which nurtures authentic humanity, morality, or spirituality. To the extent that our parents also were constrained by this

institutionalized ideal and felt it necessary to mold their children accordingly, anger and other negatively perceived emotions were discouraged and repressed in their children and in themselves.

Paths Leading Toward Healing

This project's focus is to assist men in healing the father wound within them in order that they might be freed to become fathers who nurture their children, who develop emotional connections, who build their children's self-esteem and relate to them with a growing mutuality and empathy. My belief is that through an intentionally relational group process focused on establishing emotional connections between men, men who are fathers will develop capacities for empathy and nurturance which can then be lived out in their family relationships, capacities especially significant for their relationships with their sons. The broader, long-range implications of these developing capacities in men and their sons is that their respective relationships in the public arena--with women and other men, with children, with persons of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and with the environment--will be increasingly characterized by empathy and mutuality.

The manner in which men choose to relate with other men is conditioned in large part by the perceived trustworthiness of that earliest attachment with one man,

their father. Osherson points out that as men, "we do not learn to be cared for, to get nurturance and intimacy from, men--beginning with the first men in our lives, our fathers, and ending with ourselves."⁴¹ In fact, "most of us have felt barriers between ourselves and our fathers and . . . thought that going it alone was part of what it meant to be a man."⁴² The difficulty boys experience connecting with their fathers becomes their internal subjective reality later when it comes to relating to other men and to themselves.

Maggie Scarf makes an observation based on object-relations theory that seems to supports this view:

Our inner pictures of the world, formed in childhood, provide the framework for perceiving "objective" reality in adulthood. If, for example, my vision of my father was of a distant, unapproachable man, then I will be predisposed to view intimacy with a male as virtually impossible. My "inner father" will incline me to see all other men as cold and emotionally unreachable.⁴³

As a result of these distorted inner pictures, "men wind up working on how to connect with one another, how to get together. Men feel a great loss for some fluid way of

⁴¹ Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 10.

⁴² Pittman, Man Enough, 18.

⁴³ Maggie Scarf, "Intimate Partners: Patterns in Love and Marriage," Atlantic Monthly, November 1986, 52. She is referring to marriage relationships in particular, but the implications are there for other relationships as well.

being with one another."⁴⁴ This loss of community among men "maintains the isolation in which shame breeds."⁴⁵

With the breakdown of the community of men, we no longer have access to relationships that restore a feeling of connectedness and belonging. We are left with the perception that it is up to us to endure alone, without the solace of male friendship. Shame originates in the failure of relationships; it is also there that we can begin to heal.⁴⁶

Shame, anger and grief result from the sense of emotional disconnection most men feel in relation to their own fathers. The disconnections, a concept discussed in greater detail in the next chapter in the context of self-in-relation theory, is also felt in relation to other men and to themselves as men. Disconnections cripple men's emotional lives and adversely affect their relationships with spouses and children. Thus, healing the wounds of culturally supported male disconnection is critical in enabling men to provide adequate fathercare to their children, especially their male children.

There are several paths along which men can discover healing for their woundedness. Taken together, these paths toward healing represent the religio-spiritual, socio-cultural, and imaginal dimensions of human existence. These paths are intertwined in their origins and purposes

⁴⁴ Meade, "Lamenting the Loss of Male Spirit," 80.

⁴⁵ Weller, 72.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and work together to help men effect change in their lives and in the world. Just as the facets of the wound--shame, anger, and grief--are closely interrelated, so the paths toward healing discussed here are interrelated.

Healing men's wounds is not only for their sake, but for the sake of their children, their relationships with women and men, and for the sake of society now and in the future. By moving along paths toward his own healing, a man is able to develop and exercise the kind of fathercare in which he does not shame his children, he shows his children how to express feelings of anger appropriately (and receives his children's anger toward him), and helps them to grieve the losses which come their way. In this way, a man's journey toward healing makes it possible for him to be a healing agent in the lives of his children, in his community, and in the world.

The first path toward healing is the religio-spiritual path. Some contemporary spiritualities, which have roots in the mystical tradition, speak of letting pain be pain and then letting go of wounding memories. As was discussed in the beginning section of this chapter, in order to begin the process of healing it is first necessary to bring the wound into focus and name it. Nouwen asks the question:

How are we healed of our wounding memories?
We are healed first of all by letting them be available, by leading them out of the corner of forgetfulness and by remembering them as part of our life stories. What is forgotten is unavailable, and what is unavailable cannot be

healed.⁴⁷

One of the first tasks of a men's group concerned with being fathers in today's world is to bring the wounding memories of their relationship with their own father to conscious awareness and then let them go. This involves "letting go of our childlike expectations . . . --of our need to be right over being happy. Once we stop waiting for the father we can never have, we will start healing our deepest wound and start being our real selves."⁴⁸

Entering into the pain is difficult for most men, but necessary if they hope eventually to move through it. If, as men, "we fail to let pain be pain--and our entire patriarchal culture refuses to let this happen-- . . . we will become pain's victims instead of the healers we might become. And eventually pain's perpetrators."⁴⁹ The socio-cultural implications of men's inability to feel pain is evident in this statement. Pain inflicted upon others is a way of deflecting and redirecting one's own pain. The pain of a lifetime of disconnections learned by being male exhibits itself in the perpetuation of similar

⁴⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 22.

⁴⁸ Lee, At My Father's Wedding, 8.

⁴⁹ Matthew Fox, Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions (Santa Fe: Bear and Co., 1983), 142.

disconnections.

Fox states,

The purpose of letting pain be pain is precisely this: to let go of pain. We are not asked to cling to our pain, to wallow in it, to build our lives around it. What we must do ultimately is to let go of pain. Ideally, by entering into it we become able to breathe so much freedom from within the pain that the deepest kind of letting go can truly occur. For this to happen, the naming of the pain, the letting it be pain for a while, is essential.⁵⁰

So pain, as it is being discussed here is much more than an individual's solitary pain. It is the pain inherent in family systems, gender role expectations and cultural values which leave men's vulnerabilities trapped inside their bodies unable to find release. It is the pain which is perpetuated in the exercise of power against other people instead of with and for all people. It is the pain of refusing to accept the fragile and interconnected nature of life on this planet.

This leads to a consideration of the socio-cultural path toward healing. Rohr and Martos state forcefully that as men, "we should dedicate some of our own father energies to reforming destructive patriarchal structures in our society and to nurturing and healing the next generation of men."⁵¹ The ability to engage in reforming activity

⁵⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁵¹ Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos, The Wild Man's Journey: Reflections on Male Spirituality (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1992), 90.

assumes men who are developing a conscious awareness of their own capacities for nurturance and caregiving, and are willing to exercise their fatherly prerogatives in regard to these, often in direct conflict with prevailing cultural values about gender differences and appropriate divisions of labor.

Men can talk openly about their changing roles in the family and how these are perceived by others and worked out between them and their partners. Men can help one another provide new models of fathering for their children and the next generation. Men can become politically and socially active in holding fathers accountable for the continuing care and support of their children. Men can educate themselves and other men about violence to women and children, and work with offenders and potentially violent men toward halting this social epidemic. Men can model for their sons a masculinity which does not misuse or abuse power, but rather seeks to empower others. These are representative ways in which social activism can contribute to the healing process for men.

There is a third path: the imaginal path. The Spirit of God works in a man's life to increase the boundaries of his soul. Thomas Moore speaks of the soul as "the font of who we are, and yet...beyond our capacity to devise and to

control."⁵² Soul is different from ego, and cannot be shaped or managed according to the will. Rather, "tradition teaches that soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness, and that its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination."⁵³ The devaluing and neglect of soul is evidenced in our culture "symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning."⁵⁴ Cultivating and caring for the soul is one way in which men can honor their experience and appreciate its depth of meaning.

Enhancing this care of the soul is the imaginal space created in storytelling, poetry reading and meditation that invites men to see their lives and relationships more creatively and hopefully. Moore speaks of "therapy as nothing more than bringing imagination to areas that are devoid of it, which then must express themselves by becoming symptomatic."⁵⁵ The disconnections so often characteristic of father-son relationships are symptomatic of a loss of soul and a loss of imagination. It is assumed by many that disconnection is inherent in father-son relationships, that developmentally and socially it is unavoidable--a fact of life. Through the telling of

⁵² Thomas Moore, xviii.

⁵³ Ibid., xiii.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xi.

⁵⁵ Ibid., xiii.

stories, however, both real and imagined, it is possible for fathers to imagine a new way of relating with their children.

CHAPTER 3

Self-In-Relation Theory and Fathercare

In this chapter I am chiefly concerned with the implications of the self-in-relation theory for men who are fathers. Self-in-relation theory has been taking shape over the past decade in a series of working papers coming out of the Stone Center at Wellesley College. I begin with an overview of self-in-relation theory as it relates to other approaches to human development. I then explore the meanings of key self-in-relation concepts: empathy, mutuality, self-empathy, connections, disconnections and violations, and discuss their implications for an involved and nurturing fathercare. The interrelated nature of these concepts is apparent in the way each is defined in relation to the others. Finally, I address how an understanding of what makes for healthy relationships based upon self-in-relation concepts can be made more real in men's lives, particularly as they attempt to live their fathercare in relationship with their male children.

My own experience is that of being a son, having grown up in the sixties, and now a father, parenting two young children (a boy and a girl) in the nineties. My childhood days were like those of many middle-class children of my generation. I suffered because of the emotional withdrawal of my father from our family and the seemingly insurmountable distance this created between him and me.

In my transition to fatherhood, my own issues around growing up male in middle America, and in a family where my father was absent physically and emotionally much of the time, came to the forefront of my consciousness and I was faced with needing to deal with them as well as I could. I find now that in caring for my son, who is five years old as I write this, and being genuinely interested in his thoughts and feelings and taking great pleasure in hearing him tell me about them, I am receiving a gift of relationship that is without comparison. It is as though the residual pain of my own childhood fades as I experience the living, present reality of my relationship with my son, an example of the healing power of transference. There is healing in the budding generativity I experience as the good father within me becomes more visible.

The Self-in-Relation

While most theorists of psychological development would probably agree that family patterns of interaction and communication form the environment within which persons develop, they generally stop far short of considering a more relational model that includes the notion of mutual psychological development of selves-in-relation. The Stone Center is proposing, however, "a form of development within relationships in which everyone interacts in ways that foster the psychological development of all the people

involved."¹

The fundamental understandings of human development that have pervaded the cultural landscape have often been proposed based on the male experience of separation from mother and competition with father and then generalized in an attempt to speak of women's experience as well. But have these developmental theories been helpful in producing the sort of understandings that lead to psychological growth and health?

Self-in-relation theory questions the validity of theories that focus solely on the attachments and bonding of infants and the need for separation and individuation. Jordan states that "recent infant research suggests that patterns of differentiation of self and other exist almost from birth; the notion of primitive merging may not provide an accurate description of this early phase."² In other words, the need for separation and individuation remains in tension with the need for relatedness and connection in human development.

Because theories of human development have been concerned primarily with separation and individuation as

¹ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, Disconnections, and Violations, Work in Progress, no. 33, (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1988), 2.

² Judith Jordan, "The Meaning of Mutuality," in Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center by Judith V. Jordan et al. (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 86.

early tasks of human development, the "connections" which promote health and growth have received less attention than they deserve. It is my contention that men's psychological health and growth is also enhanced through a relational stance which looks at how men can create mutually empowering relationships in their lives. Janet Surrey argues that current

developmental theory stresses the importance of separation from the mother at early stages of childhood development (Mahler, 1975), from the family at adolescence (Erikson, 1963), and from teachers and mentors in adulthood (Levinson, 1978) in order for the individual to form a distinct, separate identity.³

Stephen Bergman observes that much of current developmental psychology, especially as it relates to men and boys, supports the view that "'self' is based on separation from others and self-other-differentiation, self-*versus* other, which may then become self-*over* other."⁴ This is where competitiveness and the model of power as dominance take root in the lives of men and boys. From a theological perspective, the idea that all life is essentially interconnected illuminates the global destructiveness we see in our day--violations of persons, communities, cultures and ecologies--as representing a

³ Janet L. Surrey, "The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women's Development," in Women's Growth in Connection, 52.

⁴ Stephen J. Bergman, Men's Psychological Development: A Relational Perspective, Work in Progress, no. 48, (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1991), 3.

fundamental lack of appreciation for mutuality in relation.

The relational power conceptualized in process theology, in contrast, is "the ability both to produce and to undergo an effect, ...the capacity both to influence others and to be influenced by others. Relational power involves both a giving and a receiving."⁵ In this sense, relationships play a constitutive role in the lives of individuals and in the creation of communities.⁶ Power is understood as the "capacity to sustain a relationship" within "the mutuality of internal relatedness."⁷ The spirituality informed by process and feminist thought and ecological sensitivity discussed in Chapter 4 is concerned with this very issue of power as it relates to how boys are socialized in models of power reflected in self-versus-other and self-over-other.

Self-in-relation theory represents a significant "shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development".⁸ Not only are individuals in relationship, but relationship is in a real sense in the individual as well.

Process provides a model to discuss this
internality of relation: we receive from the past

⁵ Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," Process Studies 6, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 17.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁸ Surrey, "Self-in-Relation," 53.

in our innermost nature, and through our creative response to that past, we become ourselves. In our own becoming we in our turn influence others, who must take our influence into their own becoming, and so the dance of relationship fills our days with variations of pain and pleasure. Relations are internal to who we are.⁹

Human growth and change cannot take place in isolation from others. Relationships are integrally involved in the quality of life and the meanings and values attached to it. This is certainly true of boys, who need the physical and emotional presence of their fathers, as well as their mothers, for their growth and development as responsible, caring persons in relationship.

Daniel Stern, in his research and imaginings of the subjective world of infants, sees the idea of the "self with others" as helpful in understanding infants' experience with their caregivers. The "self with other," he concludes, is "an active mental act of construction not a passive failure of differentiation."¹⁰ Other kinds of reciprocal exchanges are apparent in early months as well, with for instance, the infant "initiating and terminating contact through gaze aversion."¹¹ By "2 or 3 years of age, children are developing a sense that others may have inner states differing from their own and can recognize certain

⁹ Marjorie Suchocki, "Original Sin Revisited," School of Theology at Claremont Occasional Paper, Sept. 1991, 5.

¹⁰ See Stern, Interpersonal World, cited in Jordan, "Meaning of Mutuality," 86.

¹¹ Jordan, "Meaning of Mutuality," 86.

affects in others."¹² This research suggests that psychological development takes place in a relational context and that the quality of relationships will clearly impact the way a child experiences the world.

I agree with Stern and other researchers who focus upon the social and relational qualities of early human development and believe these have important implications for father-son relationships. Basic trust is established in the early months and years of a child's life--a trust grounded in the experience of being valued unconditionally and having one's feeling-thoughts mirrored by one's caregivers. The wounding discussed in chapter two relates to the failure of the male parent for whatever reason to establish the bonds of trust and emotional connection in the formative developmental stages of a boy's life. This relational orientation toward self and others, discussed by Nowinski, balances the positional orientation that is dependent on performance and helps form a positive self-image and healthy sense of male identity.

Connection and separateness are not incompatible though. Rather, there exists a "paradox of separateness within connection."¹³ In order to empathize, a person must have a well-differentiated sense of self and be able to

¹² Judith V. Jordan, "Empathy and Self Boundaries," in Women's Growth in Connection, 71.

¹³ Ibid., 69.

appreciate both the differentness and the sameness of others within relationships.¹⁴ Engagement in the empathic process means that one "develops a more articulated and differentiated image of the other and hence responds in a more accurate and specific way."¹⁵ But in the "we-ness" of empathic moments within relationships the "distinctions between self and other blur experientially"¹⁶ as self-boundaries are relaxed for a brief time and there is an affective and cognitive attunement with the other person. Self-in-relation theory is an attempt to construct a new model of the developing self that promises to "encompass both the sense of coherent separateness and meaningful connection as emergent structures throughout the life span."¹⁷

Empathy, Mutuality, and Self-Empathy

Empathy is one of the central concepts in self-in-relation theory. It has been described by Alexandra Kaplan as having a dual nature comprised of affective and cognitive components. Without this capacity for affective and cognitive attunement with another, authentic relating is not possible. The affective component of empathy involves "feelings of emotional connectedness, a capacity

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

to fully take in and contain the feelings of the other person."¹⁸ The cognitive component is found in the recognition of one's own "integral sense of self and the capacity to act on the basis of that sense of self."¹⁹

Janet Surrey claims that the very definition of "relationship," as it is used in self-in-relation theory, involves the experience of mutual empathy. She writes, "The ability to be in relationship appears to rest on the development of the capacity for empathy in both or all persons involved."²⁰ Surrey offers the following working definition of relationship: "an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity: the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard."²¹

Jean Baker Miller claims that historically "our central formative relationships have not been founded on the basis of mutuality."²² In relationships formed in and by mutuality, participants respond empathically to one another, and thereby enhance the possibility of

¹⁸ Alexandra G. Kaplan, "Empathic Communication in the Psychotherapy Relationship," in Chap. 2 of Women's Growth in Connection, 46.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Surrey, "Self-in-Relation," 53.

²¹ Ibid., 61.

²² Jean Baker Miller, Connections, 2.

psychological growth in each other. Participants become active in the relationship itself, and as a result begin to "feel more empowered to act beyond the relationship."²³

So empathy and mutuality are inextricably linked. Empathic listening--the basis upon which meaningful and empowering relationships are formed--involves responding to others as they are "feeling-these-feelings-and-thinking-these-thoughts."²⁴ Within a group counseling setting, where the facilitator is also a participant, there is the possibility of mutuality in this regard. As will be discussed later in this chapter, it is also possible for a relationship established on mutuality and empathy to be developing between father and son, a possibility which depends in large part on the father's own capacity to exercise these qualities in relationship with his son. Mutuality and empathy are developmentally learned capacities in a boy's life and are best learned through example. The male parent, with whom a boy strongly identifies, plays a crucial role in this regard.

Men have little trouble envisioning the self as distinct from others, but have considerably more trouble envisioning "the relationship between self and other, with a life of its own, in movement, as a process, arising from

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Jean Baker Miller, What Do We Mean By Relationships?, Work in Progress, no. 22, (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1986), 8.

and reflecting upon all participants, its realness defined by the qualities inherent in mutual empathic connection."²⁵ The social constructions of gender promote the male ideal of the strong, silent, solitary individual in control of his life and in need of no one. To admit that others with whom one enters into relationship actually shape the way a man sees himself and how he acts, is to risk losing one's perceived control. As a result, men may sometimes exhibit a lack of empathy for relationships themselves, especially for the tenuous nature of connections in this coming together as father and son.

The empathic failure reflected in much father-son interaction is not only true in relation to the other but in relation to the self. For if one cannot bring empathy to bear on one's own life--what is called self-empathy--there is less likelihood that one will be able to offer it to others. Self-empathy is the capacity to observe oneself in relation to others and realistically assess one's feelings and thoughts in one's total life context. The irony is that empathy is best learned in a boy's formative relational context where his father, and possibly his mother, are likely struggling with it in their own relationships. Bergman observes,

Boys are supposed . . . to be like father,
to connect with father, to have an empathic
relationship with a strong and caring father.

²⁵ Bergman, 3.

Yet the disconnection from empathic relationship is an injury from which the father himself is recovering.²⁶

This generational dimension appears inescapable.

Thus the inability to practice self-empathy has adverse effects upon a man's relationships with others, especially his children. Mutual empathy calls for a man to discover the inner will and resources to be tuned in to his own "feeling-thoughts" as well as those of others. The isolated individual, who cares only for himself, is a contradiction. According to self-in-relation theory, a person's sense of self is only able to emerge fully in relation to others. This implies an attunement to how others are experiencing the relationship, and a reaching out from one's isolation to the other, a task especially important for men seeking to relate either to their sons or to other men.

Disconnections and Connections

Historically in our society men have expected women to carry the greater responsibility for fostering the growth of others, not only in the home, but in the workplace and schools. Men, however, are capable of developing the capacities for mutuality and empathy, even if their early relationships lacked these, but society (which clearly is still male-dominated in its power structures) often discourages them from doing so. There seem to be inherent

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

disconnections built into the role of father in Western culture, particularly within white middle-class America. Often the father's role, according to Bergman, "is to show a son how to become a better agent of disconnection from relationship, especially from that with the mother," or more accurately, "from a mutually empathic relationship, which happens to be with mother--from the whole relational mode of being."²⁷

James Nelson observes that men are indeed hurting, and their pain revolves around wanting to experience deeper connectedness within their relationships, but having great difficulty in doing so. Men's hurt, he claims,

is found in our yearning for emotional intimacy with other males--sons, fathers, and friends--yet finding ourselves unprepared, unequipped, and fearful of that intimacy. The hurt is in our wanting relationships of genuine equality and mutuality with women, yet finding ourselves crippled by centuries of male sexism and by our emotional dependencies on the opposite sex. The hurt is in our discovery that we have bought heavily into the message that our self-worth is directly dependent upon our occupational success, and yet the idol of work somehow does not deliver its promised salvation.²⁸

There is reason for hope, however. Many men are beginning to recognize their own woundedness as "agents of disconnections," and to seek out relationships, particularly with other men, in which they can be authentic

²⁷ Ibid., 6,4.

²⁸ James B. Nelson, The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 13.

in their own vulnerability and pain around these issues.

Disconnections arise when someone, either a child or a parent, is prevented from being in relationship for whatever reason. These disconnections occur when there is abuse or neglect, or when the surrounding relational context is unresponsive to the child's or parent's experience. Uneven relationships, which tolerate very little true expression of the feelings or thoughts of individuals, lead to an extreme form of disconnection and violation. At least one person in the interaction develops a diminished sense of self and loses what ability they had to shape the relationship and act purposefully within it.

Perhaps the worst forms of disconnection and violation are physical or sexual abuse of a child, in which the child is violated not only physically, but psychologically and spiritually as well. Such "abuse is an experience of utter vulnerability compounded by the fact that it is done to a child, who is . . . less able to cope" than an adult.²⁹

One man recalls with great pain

the hands of the men who molested me. I remember the hair on the backs of their fingers, the skin of their palms and wrists. I remember their voices, one old and pleading, the other strong and demanding. I remember not knowing what to call what they were doing to me, thinking that I was not suffering, that adults did such things to little boys. That little boys had no choice but

²⁹ Nancy J. Ramsay, "Sexual Abuse and Shame: The Travail of Recovery," in Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care, eds. Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 114.

to take it.³⁰

Adding import to such occurrences is that the abuse victim usually "has been unable to represent the truth of . . . [his] experience both within . . . [his] immediate relational context and on the larger scene."³¹ The generational dimension comes into play, with the sins of the fathers and the fathers' fathers being visited upon their sons. All are diminished in these disconnections and violations, and therefore all are victims of the failure of relationships that have insufficient empathy to sustain them. The power remains unevenly distributed in the hands of the powerful one and this forms the basis of self-justifying behavior that violates others.

The disconnection from empathic relationship is not only apparent in the inability oftentimes of fathers and sons to communicate on more than a superficial level. It is also seen in the intensely felt verbal and physical interactions which sometimes occur, as described in the following poem I wrote as I vividly remembered an incident between my father and myself as a boy of about twelve.

Sticks and Stones

in storms father
frightened, the boy backs away
father begins to yell
"why did you talk back to your mother?"
"i didn't mean..."

³⁰ Newman, 75.

³¹ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, 10.

boom, the manly voice thunders
backing up
all the way into the corner
behind the kitchen table
skin tingling
no escaping
boom, the angry thunderous clap
"don't you ever talk like that again"
timidly, "like what?"
"shut up"
deafening
sometimes i wish i couldn't hear
it's the hearing that hurts
not merely the words
but behind the words
beneath the words
"you're nobody"
"you're more trouble than you're worth"
"I don't have time for this...for you"
large hands grab the thin arms tightly
shaking the dangling boy
back against the wall
pained clenched grips
boom, again the burst of anger and hurt
and not knowing
seemingly not caring
that the wound being inflicted
is deadly as hell

This father-son scenario is not atypical of the experience of a generation of men who are now fathers themselves. Neither is it simply a matter of discipline or parenting philosophy, though these may be directly influenced by the failure of empathy reflected in men's difficulty forming connections with significant persons, whether parents, family members, or friends. Additionally, the images represent the failure created by not having male relationships, particularly father-son relationships, that allow men to experiment with mutual empathy instead of struggling with power-over models of competitiveness. Or perhaps they represent the success of disconnection in

men's development and an inability or unwillingness to see life intricately and interdependently woven together with the lives of others, especially one's children, families, and lovers. Bergman claims that, as a person becomes more efficient as an "agent of disconnection," there is increased potential for violence.³²

There are of course also numerous smaller disconnections that occur throughout one's lifetime, which need not lead to serious trouble, especially if one has other relational connections which are empowering and enlarging. Such disconnections may in fact be opportunities for growth. There remains the possibility of reconnection if the father can begin to act within the relationship to enable his son to represent his experience in an authentic manner and responds to him in a way that values his feeling-thoughts.

An example is the preschool-aged boy who is brought to school early in the year, still being unsure of himself in these new surroundings. He is fearful of being left here and begins to cry when his father says it's time for him to leave. Let us say in this example that the father is anxious himself about this new reality in his life, and pained by the temporary sense of loss as his son spends

³² Bergman, 7. Violence, broadly defined, may take many forms, e.g. abusive behavior, physical assault, sexual harassment, rape, drug/alcohol abuse (which does violence to one's own body), shaming others (particularly children) and hyper-competitiveness.

time with others. For these and perhaps other reasons, he does not respond well in the moment, but rather becomes upset by his son's crying and demonstrates this first by ignoring him, and then by saying to him something like, "You need to stop crying; big boys don't cry!" Then as the boy continues to cry and as the father moves toward the door, he becomes visibly angry and insists that his son "stop it this instance!"

In addition to the fearfulness the boy felt initially, now he is startled by his father's response and perhaps a little confused. He knows that his father wants him to be "a big boy," which means that he won't be afraid. The trouble is, he still is not completely comfortable in this setting. It's still an unknown and the other children are not always kind in their interactions. He even begins to feel angry about his father's apparent anger as he is leaving.

But if the boy can turn to his father and experience some acknowledgement of his fearfulness and other feelings, and the father is able to respond empathically, perhaps by naming the feelings to the boy and asking if his naming is accurate, or by holding him and wiping his tears while assuring him that it's okay to cry when you are sad or afraid and that he will always understand because sometimes he feels that way too, the boy will have played a part in turning the interaction around, as will the father.

The result is that the boy has learned that he can experience these difficult feelings with his father, that is, that the relationship is big enough to encompass these feelings. The feelings become less threatening because now they don't have to be experienced alone. Moreover, the boy sees his own ability to have an effect on his relationship between himself and his father. This adds to the sense of mutuality in his connection with his father.

Courage, Risk-taking and Vulnerability

In her article entitled "Courage in Connection: Conflict, Compassion, Creativity," Judith Jordan talks of the courage required for girls and women to take risks in a patriarchal society. Stereotyped notions of courage in a world which admires action and fearlessness in the face of danger, even death, lift up soldiers in combat, rock climbers, parachutists, and the like, as exemplars of courage. But what of the courage required to speak the truth about the disconnections that exist between fathers and sons, between men and men, and between men and women? To look at risk-taking and courage from this angle demands a redefinition of the culturally stereotyped image of the solitary individual facing risk alone. Instead, courage to take risks in relationship means leaving behind the entrapping silence long enough to put forth one's truth. Courage, in this instance, might be described as "the capacity to act meaningfully and with integrity in the face

of acknowledged vulnerability."³³

Vulnerability is something that men and boys have trouble accepting in themselves, and thus it is suppressed and denied through acts of "courage," which unfortunately are often expressed through dominating behavior enabling them to feel powerful. "In a power-over model," Bergman writes, "it isn't safe to take an authentic, vulnerable, relational stance."³⁴ In such a model, relationship itself can be seen as a "threat to power."

Gender-related differences in attitude toward vulnerability contribute to the societal problem of violence. "In particular, boys are taught to deny or master internal and external circumstances which generate vulnerable or helpless feelings."³⁵ Recall the incident with the preschool-age boy and his feelings of fear and apprehension at being left at school by his father. Furthermore, Bergman laments,

to participate in relationships which are not mutual is a source of sadness and rage, which, even in the dominant gender, can lead over a period of time to withdrawal, stagnation, and depression, and, characteristically, insecurity, aggression, and violence.³⁶

³³ Judith V. Jordan, Courage in Connection: Conflict, Compassion, Creativity, Work in Progress, no. 45, (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1990), 2.

³⁴ Bergman, 4.

³⁵ Jordan, Courage in Connection, 2.

³⁶ Bergman, 4.

Women have also been socialized with a certain view of masculine strength and mastery over vulnerability, and thus participate in the promulgation of these attitudes in their own sons. Whether by fathers or mothers though, boys "are actively encouraged to suppress certain relational sensitivities (e.g., feeling pain or crying when saddened or hurt by another or when seeing someone else in pain), and are taught to accept peer standards of "toughness" and invulnerability."³⁷ The increase in violence in our society might reasonably be traced to the temptation of those with power to deny or suppress their own vulnerability and to resort to "violence against and abuse of those who are less powerful and therefore vulnerable."³⁸

The failure of empathy in men's lives too often leads them to respond with violence to vulnerable feelings, persons, and situations within relationships. This does not mean only the angry contempt that is voiced loudly or the violence done physically or sexually, but perhaps an angry putdown by one person to another from a relative position of power. "Anger is a vulnerable feeling," according to Miller, in that "an angry person usually also feels hurt and in pain and opens this up for and to

³⁷ Judith V. Jordan, "Empathy and the Mother-Daughter Relationship," in Chap. 2 of Women's Growth in Connection, 32.

³⁸ Jordan, Courage in Connection, 2.

others."³⁹ The implications of Miller's view, Bergman observes, are that if the anger "can be worked on with father or mother, it can bring the boy more into relationship. If not, it can turn into aggression and violence, or isolation."⁴⁰

Take, for example, the homophobic reaction of men who, unfulfilled in their desire for relational connections with other men, cast accusatory glances at those who have gone further in establishing such connections. The "gay male is resented because he symbolizes the intimacy of men with men, which all men desire but few seem to have."⁴¹ The resentment builds in all people because of the interdependent nature of a homophobic society in which "gays inevitably internalize homophobia . . . and it becomes self-rejection."⁴²

Something similar might be said of the difficulty men have in establishing meaningful connections with others in their lives, whether women, children, or men, and of the resentment they feel towards those who seem to be more at ease in relational contexts. Such resentment gets mirrored

³⁹ Jean Baker Miller and Janet L. Surrey, Revisioning Women's Anger: The Personal and the Global, Work in Progress, no. 43, (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1990), 2.

⁴⁰ Bergman, 7.

⁴¹ Nelson, 64.

⁴² Ibid.

in their self-image and eventually spills over into the way they choose to use their power as a tool for building up their self-importance at the expense of others. All of this points to the importance of developing a vision of fathercare which does not reproduce the failures of empathy which have existed between fathers and sons in the past, but which builds upon the tenuous connections men are establishing with one another.

Fathercare

Each father must create the shape and texture of the sort of father they wish to be. The art of fathercare is not so much learned in books from the experts as it is in the honest exploration of the images of fatherhood men carry within themselves. These internal images of father are formed from what men remember of their own fathers. Most men have a somewhat shadowy internal image of father developed in the mysterious comings and goings of their fathers as they grew up. Their fathers left for work early every morning and returned home in the evening tired. Fathers worked to provide shelter, put food on the table, and clothe their families. They performed these vital functions quite well in most instances. But these traditional role expectations left little room for imagination and spontaneity.

This section focuses on what it takes to be an involved father today. Beyond the increased involvement in

the practical aspects of parenting which many men and women agree is important, how can a man be the father he wants to be? An obvious first step is that a man be committed to learning a more relational paradigm for his role as father. He can begin by exploring the wounded father within him who wished he had spent more time with his children. He can practice being emotionally present to his family. He can get in touch with his inner child who loves to play and explore and get dirty. He can be available and yet know his own limits. He can be in touch with his own needs for support, community, and intimacy. He can exercise self-care. Rigidly defined role expectations need to be broken down, not so that there are no expectations remaining, but so that a man may be free to have the joy of discovering what it means to be a father to his children in the way that he is uniquely able to do.

I do not wish to impose my paradigm for fathercare on others. I simply wish to offer some important ingredients that have shaped the way I see myself in relation to my children. Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip A. Cowan have suggested that most of the writing in both the research literature and the popular literature "continues to promote the fiction that what is primary in child and family development occurs between mother and child."⁴³ Fathers

⁴³ Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip A. Cowan, "Men's Involvement in Parenthood: Identifying the Antecedents and Understanding the Barriers," in Men's Transitions to

who wish to be more involved in the care of their children encounter these outdated notions and must convince themselves and others that their involvement is worthwhile and truly matters.

The data collected by the Cowans about the satisfaction of various caregiving arrangements tried by parents "support the notion that contemporary fathers want a more central role in the rearing of their children and are more satisfied with themselves and their marriages when they find ways to be involved in rearing their children."⁴⁴ This does not mean that negotiating such involvement will be easy. Many socially constructed gender roles still imply limited involvement of fathers in the care of their children, and work-related expectations and policies do not encourage fathers (or parents in general) to take the necessary time to care for their children, a myopic social vision if ever there was one.

Other studies have been conducted in recent years to measure the effects of increased father involvement in the care of children. These studies, which have implications not only for the amount of fathercare but for the nature and quality of it as well, have shown rather consistent

Parenthood, eds. Phyllis W. Berman and Frank A. Pedersen (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assocs., 1987), 171.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

results.⁴⁵ Children with highly involved fathers (i.e., infants and preschool-aged children whose fathers are responsible for at least 40 percent of the childcare within the family) "are characterized by increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, and a more internal locus of control,"⁴⁶ all of which suggest a greater likelihood of developing and appreciating mutuality and empathy within relationships.

This is not to suggest that a father's involvement in itself produces these results, as though a mother's care is somehow inadequate. Several factors are considered important to these results, including the parents assuming less sex-stereotyped roles, a diversity of interactional

⁴⁵ See N. Radin, "Primary Caregiving and Role-sharing Fathers," in Nontraditional Families, ed. Michael E. Lamb (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Assocs., 1982), 173-204; N. Radin and A. Sagi, "Childrearing Fathers in Intact Families in Israel and the U.S.A.," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly 28 (1982): 111-36; A. Sagi, "Antecedents and Consequences of Various Degrees of Paternal Involvement in Child Rearing: The Israeli Project," in Nontraditional Families, 205-32; K. D. Pruett, "Two-year Followup of Infants of Primary Nurturing Fathers in Intact Families," paper presented to the Second World Congress on Infant Psychiatry, Cannes, France, 1983; B. F. Carlson, "The Father's Contribution to Child Care: Effects on Children's Perceptions of Parental Roles," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 54 (1984): 123-36; and M. A. Easterbrooks and W. A. Goldberg, "Toddler Development in the Family: Impact of Father Involvement and Parenting Characteristics," Child Development 55 (1984): 740-52, cited in Michael E. Lamb and David Oppenheim, "Fatherhood and Father-Child Relationships: Five Years of Research," in Fathers and Their Families, eds. Stanley H. Cath, Alan Gurwitt, and Linda Gunsberg (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1989), 21.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

styles of two involved parents, and a family context and social policies allowing both parents to find fulfillment in having adequately close relationships with their children. Still, when more than seven out of ten persons of those polled in a recent survey agree that "the most significant problem facing American families today is the physical absence of the father from the home," and "56 percent believe that fathers do not know what is going on in their children's lives," and half believe "that fathers are spending less time with their children than did fathers of the previous generation," there is cause for continued concern.⁴⁷

Children are often socialized into rigidly defined gender roles, girls being taught to take care of others (an empathy for others and a concern for relationships) and boys simply to deny their real feelings and focus on results more than relationships. A poem written one day after watching children play outside my office window, illustrates this point.

Worlds Apart

through the curtained window i watch
a playground of young children
boys running, shouting, jostling,
girls sitting, talking, laughing,
boisterous pirates, brave soldiers,
noisy race car drivers,

⁴⁷ Ken Canfield, director of the nonprofit National Center for Fathering based in Manhattan, Kansas, had the Gallup organization conduct the survey in 1991. Reported in Louv, 32.

listening friends all sitting in a circle,
 a girl taunted, teased, begins to cry
 a boy calls, "teacher,"
 and he points, "she's crying"
 he stands and watches the comforting teacher
 concern written over his little dirt-smeared face
 "is she alright?"
 "yes"
 relief, but also a reaching out
 while other children have been oblivious
 wrapped in their own worlds
 their own protective, narrowly defined worlds
 of girl and boy
 of boy and girl
 sharp distinctions these
 at the age of only three

I am not uninterested in the ways mothers and
 daughters share in mutually empathic relationships (or
 mothers and sons, fathers and daughters). In so doing they
 pass on the significance of a relational way of being from
 one generation of women to the next. But it would seem to
 be quite different from the ways fathers and sons connect
 with one another around various physical or mental
 activities, if in fact they are able to make a meaningful
 connection at all.

What role do fathers play in showing their sons how to
 relate empathically? In all likelihood the qualities of
 mutuality and empathy were not experienced by present-day
 fathers in their relationships with their own fathers. Is
 it possible for men to develop an empathic capacity even
 without this earlier experience? If so, where will they
 learn it? Is the father-son relationship itself a
 redemptive opportunity for fathers to experiment with
 empathic interaction in relation to their sons? Is being

in community with other men an opportunity to practice the relational skills of mutual empathy?

I believe these are just such opportunities, for in his son a father is reminded of the whirl of confusing thoughts and feelings he experienced growing up, and if he can take this awareness and use it to "feel with" his son, the door is opened to a mutually empathic relating that will nourish each of them and both of them together. Likewise, relating to other men in ways that are non-competitive and valuing of the other's experiences and feelings, is like being in a workshop learning a new skill, in this instance the capacity for empathy. To some extent men can be good fathers for one another as they practice relating in mutually empathic ways.

The teaching and learning of empathy is a topic that has received little attention in the literature. Hoffman analyzes some empirical research on the differences between girls and boys in the capacity for empathy--defined for the purposes of his analysis as "the vicarious affective response to another's feelings."⁴⁸ One study measured empathic response by showing a "series of slide sequences in which children of the same age and sex as the subject are shown in different affect-eliciting situations (e.g., the child has lost his pet dog)," with an accompanying

⁴⁸ Martin L. Hoffman, "Sex Differences in Empathy and Related Behaviors," Psychological Bulletin 84 (1977): 712.

narration describing the events in the slides, and then asking the child, "How do you feel?"⁴⁹ Scores rating the degree of correlation between their response and the affect portrayed in the scenes are then assigned.

"The ideal measure of an empathic response would include evidence that (a) affect has been aroused in the observer and (b) the quality and direction of the affect correspond to those experienced by the person being observed."⁵⁰ In other studies, "facial expressions and body movements" were rated as subjects watched either slides or films "depicting people in happy, sad, and other types of emotional situations."⁵¹ In all six comparison studies based on this definition of empathy, "females obtained higher empathy scores."⁵²

One interesting dimension to the studies Hoffman analyzed is that they illustrated the determinative influence of socialization on the capacity for empathy in boys and girls. The cognitive component of empathy--that is, recognizing and assessing the affective state of another--showed little noticeable difference between boys and girls. But girls, as noted above, were more likely to vicariously experience the other person's feelings. In

⁴⁹ Ibid., 714.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 713.

⁵¹ Ibid., 714.

⁵² Ibid., 713.

other words, "when encountering someone in an emotional situation, both sexes are equally adept at assessing how that person feels, but in females the awareness of the other's feelings is more apt to be accompanied by a vicarious affective response."⁵³

In attempting to understand why this might be true, Hoffman distinguishes the expressive role from the instrumental role operative within functioning families. "The expressive role--being responsive to the needs and feelings of others," differs from "the instrumental role--acting as liaison between the family and other social institutions."⁵⁴ With regard to these differing, but equally necessary roles within families, Hoffman postulates about the socialization of girls and boys.

Females have traditionally been socialized to acquire expressive traits such as empathy, compassion, and giving and receiving affect. Males are initially socialized expressively, but with age are increasingly encouraged to acquire instrumental traits, such as mastery and problem solving.⁵⁵

One study involving four year old boys showed their basic "orientation toward instrumental, ameliorative action" even in response to a request for feeling.⁵⁶ "The boys'

⁵³ Ibid., 716.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 712.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 719. See study done by M. L. Hoffman and L. E. Levine, "Early Sex Differences in Empathy," in Developmental Psychology 11 (1976): 557-58.

response may have . . . reflected a tendency to consider action alternatives rather than to empathize--to act rather than to feel--in interpersonal situations."⁵⁷

In addition, the socialization of boys to be brave and not overtly show fear or distress, especially not to cry, "may play a role in making them less empathic."⁵⁸ The socialization process doesn't seem to encourage the qualities of empathy and mutuality needed for boys' interpersonal development. Boys tend to exhibit these qualities with their peers less than girls do. Boys often don't experience relationships with their fathers marked by these qualities either, so when they become fathers themselves there is no internal basis for relating with their own children in these ways. As a result, the cycle of emotionally shallow and restrictive relationships is passed on from one generation of men to another.

What sort of "fathercare" is needed for the development of the capacity for empathy in sons? In a gendered society, where economic productivity, the mastery of skills, and self-sufficiency are the values men claim for themselves, how will men find the courage to embrace the notion of what might be called mutually empathic fathercare? Hopefully there is sufficient room in the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 720.

wounded experiences of men to explore these questions about the potential within father-son relationships for mutual growth in connection. Hopefully as men risk opening themselves in the company of other men the healing process that results will enlarge men's capacity for relating in mutually empathic ways with their children, their spouses, and their friends.

Other clues in response to these questions and concerns lie in the modeling done in the relationship between parents, as well as the encouragement the child receives in expressing his or her feelings and thoughts ("feeling-thoughts," as Jean Baker Miller calls them) in an open and accepting environment. Miller, in fact, states her belief that "the first factor making for the child's good development is that the parents have a mutually empowering relationship with each other."⁵⁹ So empathic fathercare rests in part on empathic partnering with the other parent. In discussing men's psychological development, Bergman argues convincingly:

if the main example of how men and women relate is filled with misunderstandings, power struggles, and miscommunications, the boy may come to see this as the normal way, and/or may come not to expect much in relationship.⁶⁰

But if fathers and mothers seek to relate in mutually empathic ways with one another, they provide a working

⁵⁹ Jean Baker Miller, Connections, 12.

⁶⁰ Bergman, 6.

model for their children of the nature of healthy, life-sustaining relationships and contribute to their children's psychological growth. In addition, men's male friendships potentially provide an alternative model to the competitive, power-over model of men's relating, by demonstrating ways of relating with other men characterized by mutuality and empathic understanding.

Because gender is socially constructed, part of the process of breaking down stereotypical sex-roles is acknowledging the reality of such social constructions. The process is facilitated through the modeling of role flexibility within families. As boys see their fathers taking roles within the family that stereotypically have been those of women, their perceptions of the meaning of gender roles will shift. With women becoming more active in the public arena, additional responsibility will fall on both parents in the raising of children. This will require increased involvement on the part of fathers in the caregiving role, and has the potential of inviting a sense of mutuality in both marital and parental relationships.

More is needed though, than simply a greater sense of shared responsibility between two parents. The basic model inherent in parenting, according to Surrey, emphasizes

that the direction of growth is not toward greater degrees of autonomy or individuation and the breaking of early emotional ties, but toward a process of growth within relationship, where both or all people involved are encouraged and challenged to maintain connection and to foster,

adapt to, and change with the growth of the other.⁶¹

If this is true, it offers a challenge to men seeking to improve their relationships with their children, their spouses and their friends. The self-in-relation model is instructive for men who want to connect with other men in a way that offers healing for their woundedness and empowerment for their relationships.

Toward Mutual Empathy in Men's Lives

This project is interested in how a relational model of psychological development might affirm men in their search to be known and to know others in mutually enriching relationships. Men tend to rely on women to understand and interpret, and to some extent even live, their emotional lives for them. There is a great need for men to learn to relate in mutually empathic ways with other men and with their own sons, the next generation of men. Only as men dare to relate more deeply with one another will they be able to pass on their own learning to their sons.

How strangely true these words must sound to a generation of men who have grown up not knowing or being known by their fathers in any meaningful sense. They were taught, and taught well, not to express feelings openly, because then their vulnerability would show and others

⁶¹ Surrey, "Self-in-Relation," 60.

might take advantage of them. They were taught to be "agents of disconnection," as Bergman names the problem from a male perspective. They were taught, in other words, to be on guard. Little did they realize the price to be paid for guardedness when what one truly wants is to be seen and appreciated for who one is, not some image of the tough, independent, invulnerable man.

The way toward mutual empathy in men's lives lies in their willingness to risk new modes of relating--involving the expression of a wider range of emotions, open to the wounded father within, and willing to enter into the affective state of others. Men who are lacking in the experience of empathy might be described as having "overly rigid self boundaries and the poor tolerance of affect" characteristic of isolated individuals.⁶² In contrast to the empathic failure of someone who becomes overly stimulated by others' affect, this person "cannot relax self boundaries enough to allow the affective flow necessary for empathic connection."⁶³ Yet empathy is a capacity which can be learned when men move out of the isolation of being solitary individuals toward mutually supportive relationships.

As a man exercises greater self-empathy by showing increased awareness of his own affect and cognition in

⁶² Jordan, "Empathy and Self Boundaries," 75.

⁶³ Ibid.

various interpersonal situations, and thus becomes more fully known to himself, he is better able to enter empathically into others' experiences. The premise of this project is that a group model of men meeting together is one appropriate context within which to learn not only the skills of interpersonal relating, but a new way of being in the world--a relational orientation toward self and others which enhances all of life's relationships.

CHAPTER 4

A Spirituality for Men on the Healing Journey

In this chapter I consider how the faith community and the male pastoral counselor can help men move toward healing the father wound, both within themselves and in the world, and developing healthier father images. The role of the pastoral counselor in this regard is to be a wounded healer. In order for a pastor or counselor to work effectively with men's issues it is important that he acknowledge his own woundedness and be on the journey toward healing as well.¹ Thus the spirituality being proposed here applies to all men who are on the healing journey, counselor and group participants alike.

The role of the faith community, in like manner, is to understand the healing of persons and relationships within the larger context of the healing of the world. The faith community is called upon to work with men toward the end that men's relationships with other men, with women, and with children, will become more just and mutual. The wounds felt by many men are directly related to the wounding which has been inflicted upon all people by traditional patriarchy. Because Christian Scripture and history are deeply rooted in patriarchal world views, the

¹ I use "he" to refer to pastors in this instance because the concern here is with male spirituality. The issue of whether a woman pastor or counselor can work with men in healing the father wound and developing positive father images is beyond the scope of this discussion.

contemporary faith community does well to be critically reflective of the ways in which it is still captive to such views and seek to overcome them. Christ seeks kindred spirits in carrying out the redemptive ministries of justice and peace in the world.

The approach to men's issues I present in this project is compatible in many ways with the popular men's movement, in its attention to the father wound, in its use of poetry and storytelling to evoke men's thought and feeling, and in its commitment to encouraging men to talk about feelings of shame, anger, and grief. At the same time, my approach is different in that it is grounded in a Christian spirituality that is informed by ecological and feminist concerns. As will be discussed, this approach to the issues which men face in our society today is a relational one. The relationships men have with women, with children, and with the earth, all have a great deal to do with male socialization toward domination through the exercise of power. Men's healing which is deep and lasting calls upon men to relinquish such power relationships and establish new ones based in mutuality and justice. Personal, social, political, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of men's lives meet in the process of healing.

In my view, pastoral counseling integrates a wholistic understanding of human experience--that is, the human person as body, mind, and spirit--into an understanding of

life that acknowledges and appreciates the complex interrelatedness of human beings, the various cultural, social, economic, political and religious contexts in which they live, the earth's ecosystem, and the experienced reality of a divine creative presence. Like other forms of counseling or psychotherapy, it honors the individual's story as a part of the larger human story, but the scope includes a pastoral awareness of the divine presence that lures each of us toward new, more energetic and creative, ways of living.

The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling states that "normatively, pastoral counseling offers a relationship to a person, the pastoral counselor, who represents religious faith and who is disciplined and honest in his or her caring"² Other helping professionals recognize the intrapsychic, interpersonal, family system, and to some extent the social, dynamics at work in person's lives that lead to problems of various kinds, durations, and severities. The pastoral counselor seeks to understand these dynamics too, but from a vantage point that includes issues of meaning and value as potential areas for spiritual growth. Theological and psychological perspectives are brought together in pastoral counseling to serve as resources in understanding the human condition of

² John Patton, "Pastoral Counseling," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care And Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 853.

brokenness more fully and envisioning ways of helping individuals and communities become more whole.

The theological dimension of the pastoral counseling relationship considers how the Holy Spirit is active in the world and in the lives of individuals and communities in ways that promote healing and wholeness. The multivaried contexts within which human life exists, that is, the natural worlds, the cultural worlds, the social and interpersonal worlds, and the inner psychic worlds all contribute positively and/or negatively to the sense of well-being a person or community experiences. From a theological perspective, each of these contexts may add meaning to life if a person is located in communities or relationships that assist them in facing hard realities with hope and courage and in discovering the redemptive and creative possibilities within such realities.

Pastoral counseling concerns itself with seeing others' worlds and hearing the stories of their experience in a way that acknowledges the hard places and lifts up the possibilities for change and growth. Seeing and responding with accurate empathy invites transformation in individuals, communities, and societies, toward the end that justice with peace grows and increasingly characterizes all the relationships on earth. Validating a man's experience by listening to him tell his story, a counseling concept discussed in the next chapter, is a

healing factor in the group model of therapy being promoted in this project. Working with a group of men who are fathers or anticipate becoming fathers is an opportunity to establish a healing community in which issues affecting our lives together on this earth may be explored.

Ministry of Presence

The pastoral relationship is characterized primarily as a ministry of presence, in my view. A pastoral counselor is present to others, both as a human being and as a representative of the faith community and of the God in whom we claim faith.³ In this way the Christ, one who is fully human and fully divine, is invited to be present in these human encounters as well. For wherever persons are moving together toward deeper awareness of their own human and divine origins and relatedness, Christ is present in their midst. My pastoral assumptions in relation to men's work are that I am on a healing journey with brothers and that Christ is a companion on the way. The journey, however, invites men to renew and strengthen the bonds of mutual connection not only with one another but with others.

Matthew's Gospel interprets Christ's presence in the world through the prophetic tradition regarding the name to

³ I am indebted to Kathleen Greider, Assistant Professor, Pastoral Care and Counseling, School of Theology at Claremont, for expressing the representative nature of ordained clergy in this helpful way. It highlights the relational quality of pastoral identity.

be given to the Messiah: "'Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us.'"⁴ It is my conviction that human transformation begins in the recognition of God's presence in all the dimensions of human existence. Such recognition might occur in the insight offered by another that weaknesses or struggles may potentially be reframed as strengths to be offered to oneself and others. The pastoral relationship can provide just such a trusted place where the presence of the creative life-giving Spirit of Christ can enable men to discover and draw on their own inner strength for the journey.

Henri Nouwen speaks of the prayerful life in a way that elicits hope for one's self, neighbors, and the world. "In prayer," he writes, "you encounter God not only in the small voice and the soft breeze, but also in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in the distress and joy of your neighbor, and in the loneliness of your own heart."⁵ This speaks deeply to pastoral identity I have discovered within myself, that of walking with those in my care through their moments of distress and of joy. The loneliness finds expression in both my personal and professional life and is what enables me to be an empathic listener with those who come to me. It is a loneliness not uncommon to the

⁴ Matt. 1:23b, NRSV.

⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, With Open Hands (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 79.

experience of men in contemporary culture. As a pastoral counselor I see my role within a group being to model a presence during those moments when men are most closely in touch with their feelings and thoughts about their life experience, no matter how full of pain or joy, anger or sadness, or other feelings, and in so doing to honor them and their experiences.

A ministry of presence means that a pastoral counselor will attend to the fullest expressions in others, as well as in himself, of what it means to be human. The human condition is marred by brokenness--a brokenness of spirit and of relationships. What is sin, if not the distortions of who we were created to be and of what our relationships with one another were intended to look like. A pastoral theology that recognizes the brokenness within human experience will see within this observed reality the roots of sin and estrangement, both personal and systemic.

When tender psyches are neglected or abused, when family patterns of behavior become destructive, when betrayals within relationships occur, when prejudicial or cruel attitudes and behaviors flourish, or when other signs of brokenness occur, as a pastoral counselor I am aware that I share in the brokenness that is the human condition. There is no glossing over the systemic nature of evil in the world, and yet there is equally the power of righteousness (that is, justice and peace discovered in

right relationships with others, the earth, and God) and moral virtue within persons and the communities in which they live. How to tap into the healing capacities within the self-in-community, and draw on the strength of genuine and supportive relational connections, are ongoing struggles in the pastoral counseling relationship.

Listening to Men's Stories

Human dignity, from a pastoral perspective, is grounded in a conscious awareness of the "breath of life" which the Spirit of God breathes into us in creating new ways of living. All of the natural order, not only human life but the very material world of earth, sky, sea, and sun, is within God and God is within it. What we humanly know of God lies all around us and within us. Because humans are created in and bearers of the divine image, we are of intrinsic worth. Pastoral ministry calls this image forth in the process of hearing the truths beneath the words of individuals' and communities' stories.

Within the context of a community of men gathered for the intended purpose of becoming better fathers to their children, the truths are often about deeply felt wounds of the absent, neglectful or abusive father. These are the long denied wounds of the one man who failed to father them, probably because he himself had not been adequately fathered, and are all the more poignant because they have often gone unrecognized. Speaking the truth which lies

beneath the pain enables men to move through the pain toward healing themselves and their relationships.

There are healing and transformative possibilities brought forth in the act of listening to another's story. This is especially true when the counselor is able to locate the person's story within the larger context of meaning and value made available through a pastoral vision of life. Such a vision includes the religious search for beauty, truth, and a spirituality concerned with health and wholeness. "To listen to another person is to feel that person as God feels (the person), from the inside rather than the outside. It is to hear a person through the heart of God."⁶ Listening is a means of grace for the man whose masculine orientation toward life has not previously recognized the value of being heard and known in his inner being and becoming.

Listening is a learned sensitivity with roots in one's own experience of being heard or not heard in significant and formative relationships. This is why listening is so crucial in establishing and maintaining healthy, life-giving relationships. Men will often tend to listen to others--whether it be their spouse, their child, a friend or acquaintance--with less than their full attention because they are busy processing how they will respond, or

⁶ Jay B. McDaniel, Earth, Sky, Gods and Mortals: Developing an Ecological Spirituality (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publ., 1990), 171.

if there is a problem being discussed, how they can solve it. This tendency, of course, is not limited to men. This preoccupation with one's own agenda and with problem-solving does, however, often lead men to miss the relational quality of listening--that is, how listening is meant for the sake of relationship.

Listening also has an empathic quality. It involves getting into the skin of another, looking at the world through their eyes for a time. It means developing "a feel for the moods, emotions, and ways of thinking"⁷ which inform another's life. It is not "an act of knowing about," but rather "an act of knowing with."⁸

In genuine listening, the dichotomy between subject and object is eliminated, because at a certain level of the listener's psyche, we "become" the other person, the person listened to. This does not mean that we, as listeners, lack autonomy in our own right; rather, it means that our autonomy is a relational autonomy.⁹

Autonomy needs to be viewed not from a stereotypical masculine perspective, in terms of self-sufficiency, invulnerability, or loneliness. Rather, it can be envisioned as arising out of the very connectedness which accompanies the act of genuine listening. This discovery of autonomy within empathic relating may be likened to the "paradox of separateness within connection" mentioned in

⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 170-71.

Chapter 3.¹⁰ Because male psychological health and growth also depend on experiencing the self in relation to others and the world, listening is of therapeutic value within a men's group dealing with the father wound and issues of masculinity.

Recognizing the Movements in Men's Souls

There are movements in the souls of men which call for pastoral attention. The images of a tide moving slowly in and out, of a baby breathing softly in her crib while asleep, and of an old grandfather clock steadily counting the seconds of the day, are all images of rhythmic movement akin to the movement that takes place in a man's soul from the day he is born.¹¹ I argue here that the long-term movement over a man's life is toward creativity and generativity--dimensions of human life that are repressed rather early in a boy's experience.

Movement implies some degree of change. When a man is involved in movement, he changes places for a time, tries out a new place, and experiences a different set of relationships with the world around him. There is an empathic quality to movement. Being in a different place may bring about a change in a person or it may not. Surely at the very least though, the experience is carried within

¹⁰ Jordan, "Empathy and Self Boundaries," 69.

¹¹ The same images apply to women, only perhaps with slightly different emphases because of gender roles placed on persons within society.

a man as an alternative view of what life can be like for him.

Movement is for the sake of enlivening the soul, not necessarily changing the personality or adjusting a lifestyle or producing growth in the individual. Movement doesn't allow one to become stuck in one position for too long--rather, it demands risk and invites new experiences into one's life. Such movement provides the best soil for change which will be life-enriching, however, because it is within the movement itself that a man's soul is allowed to experiment, to cast aside old behaviors and try out new ones, to challenge old assumptions, to entertain different views, and to revel in the mysteries of being human, being a man, and being a father.

Movement is not always about changing places. It sometimes means experiencing one's place in life more fully. It may mean moving into depths of one's own soul, into the deepest felt joys and sorrows of one's experience of growing up male. It may mean owning one's responsibility for the problems which exist in one's life. Often when men experience problems or develop uncomfortable symptoms, their first thought, if they haven't already denied that a problem exists, is to try to fix it or remove it altogether. What would happen if men simply chose to move into the problem, assuming it is not life-threatening or self-defeating, embracing it and seeking to learn from

it? With an attitude toward learning, men could eventually let go of the problems and move into deeper self-understanding.

Movement, as I am using the term, is not a developmental term either. It is not movement toward some elusive maturity or wholeness. Movement of the soul means that a man is seeing more nearly who he is as an authentic self-in-relation. In seeing, perhaps for the first time, the dimensions of his soul, a man honors and values the deepest parts of himself. Thus it is not a movement away from one's current personality structure, but rather a movement into one's soul that allows one to enlarge one's world and to move into the presence of others. In this sense, movement of the soul, or movement within the soul, expands one's inner world to include an awareness of the world of others and integrates a new understanding of the interrelatedness of life into the self. Movement of the soul opens one to the experiences of another, and is thus a movement toward mutually empathic relating. In this way one can be enriched by the life experiences of another that are brought into the context of a relational meeting.

Some of the movements in the soul of a man are to be discovered in the movements from self to other, from separation to attachment, from solitude to community, from inner work to outer experience, from silence to speech, from recreation to vocation, and from independence to

interdependence. The desired movement is best described as a two-way movement which increases the well-being of the person and the mutuality of his relationships. Only as one attends to the dynamic needs of one's soul is one able to fully meet another person in an authentic human encounter.

Cultivating Community Among Men

Community may be defined as "the condition of living with others,"¹² a definition which on the surface doesn't communicate the fullness of what I believe is the deeply lived quality of authentic relating within community. Of course, participants in a men's group live with one another only for periods of short duration in a structured setting where feelings and thoughts are called forth through interpersonal relating. In their brief time together, however, the group develops a story of its own based on the shared experience of being together, and men live with this shared story and carry it with them in their daily experience. The stories other men share enable community to be an ongoing lived reality even while group members are apart.

Knowles speaks of "authentic selfhood-in-community" in which persons find a sense of belonging even as they grow in awareness of their own feelings and thoughts while with

¹² "Community," Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 2nd College ed.

others.¹³ This represents a complementarity between the discovery of authentic selfhood and authentic community which is consistent, I believe, not only with psychological principles but with theological ones. Individual autonomy is relativized within the interdependent nature of group life when "authentic selfhood-in-community is the goal toward which each member and the group as a whole strive."¹⁴ From a theological perspective, there is a healthy and dynamic tension which develops in the recognition that "the ground of selfhood and community is God."¹⁵

Establishing a sense of community can sometimes be difficult for men. Because men's lives tend to be oriented around activity and achievement men find it difficult to nurture "the capacities for intimacy and friendship"¹⁶ essential to authentic community. The McGill Report on Male Intimacy concludes that men in our society fear self-disclosure and have relationships characterized by the following:

That men's friendships with other men tend to revolve around particular tasks, so they have qualifying labels: "a work friend," "a golf friend," and so forth.

¹³ Joseph W. Knowles, Group Counseling (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 102.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nelson, 49.

That men are more self-disclosing to women than to other men, and that they tend to rely upon women to be interpreters of their relationships and interior lives.

That for men sex seems the supreme intimacy, and the notion of loving someone as an adult peer seems to imply a sexual relationship.

That because they relate competitively to them, fathers have a difficult time disclosing themselves emotionally and vulnerably to their sons.¹⁷

Other factors contributing to the difficulty are the lack of models from childhood for adult male friendship, and the persistent homophobia among men.

Yet the capacities for intimacy, mutuality, friendship and empathy are all important in cultivating authentic community. Community is able to develop among men when trust is established, when interpersonal sharing is expected, and when emotional honesty and vulnerability are valued. In one sense, such a men's group represents an artificially constructed set of relationships which do not reflect either the diversity or the intensity of daily encounters. In another sense, however, men need a place and a time to intentionally work at healing their own images of masculinity--especially as these relate to sexuality and spirituality--so that their relationships with children, spouses, and friends will be more intimate and emotionally satisfying. A group setting encourages men to do this intentional work.

¹⁷ Michael E. McGill, The McGill Report on Male Intimacy (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985) cited in Nelson, 48, 49.

It is essential that men address the issue of power in their experience as males if they are to create just relationships with women, men, and children. The men's movement speaks of sharing power. Yet in "unilaterally asserting when, where, and how to achieve that goal . . . it preserves for 'new' males the traditional 'old' male prerogative of power-over."¹⁸ Garth Baker-Fletcher speaks of the need to undermine and transform "traditional male patterns of dominating power" by listening to "the voices of excluded men and women."¹⁹ A genuinely new vision of maleness "will need to be shaped by the perspectives, criticisms, pain, and joy that African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native-American, and poor Euro-American men and women can contribute."²⁰ Baker-Fletcher writes:

A transformed understanding of power names *intimate communal interaction* as genuine and creative power. A man's "intimate connection" (to borrow James Nelson's insightful phrase) with God, neighbors, natural environment, and family would become the determining factor of power. Transforming the traditional glorification of the autonomous man who disconnects from community in order to be powerful, we simply state: *Power is intimate*, and it needs to be distributed in a just manner in units of care.²¹

McDaniel's ecological spirituality, which has

¹⁸ Garth Baker-Fletcher, "Escape Artists," Christianity and Crisis 51, no. 19 (Jan. 13, 1992): 419.

¹⁹ Ibid., 420.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

important contributions to make toward a responsible form of male spirituality, speaks of three types of care reflected in the biblical idea of *imago dei*: inclusive care, which invites us to see the intrinsic value in all forms of life, just care, which "recognizes the urgent need within human communities around the globe for economic equity, political participation, and personal liberty,"²² and intimate care, which involves "affection for, tenderness toward, and deep understanding of another person."²³ He makes the further points about the relationship between justice and intimacy: "intimacy is qualitatively richer than justice," and "justice is an enabling and sometimes indispensable condition for intimacy."²⁴ Also, "to enjoy intimacy without seeking justice is to miss the mark of responding to God's call for shalom."²⁵ I agree that justice is necessary for intimacy to occur, and especially with regard to family relationships. I question the evaluative statement of the comparative richness of these two, and would be more inclined to see the three forms of care he discusses--inclusive, just, and intimate--in their dynamic quality in relation to each other.

²² McDaniel, 167.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Ibid., 169.

His ideas are shared here because the search for community among men takes place within larger social forces calling for justice: justice in relation to poverty affecting women and children, justice in relation to indigenous cultures and oppressed groups of people, justice in relation to economic opportunity and political voice, justice in relation to the natural environment and the other forms of life with whom our lives are integrally connected. If men are to find healing for the woundedness of outmoded images of masculinity and the models of power which prevent mutual relationships, and discover the intimacy which is often so elusive in their lives, they will need to raise their consciousness around issues of justice and renew an inclusive care for the world.

The primary role of the pastoral counselor in cultivating community is to foster an atmosphere of mutual support as will be discussed in the next chapter when a theoretical approach to working with men in groups is considered. Mutually supportive community requires time, patience, encouragement, and the willingness to use teachable moments during group time to evaluate how well members have been heard and supported as they share issues of relevance to their lives as fathers, husbands and men. From a religious perspective, community is made possible in the redemptive moments when a group member feels acknowledged and respected in spite of what he perceives as

personal weakness or failure. Men being vulnerable with men by sharing attitudes, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors concerning what it's like for them to be a father is an ingredient which is necessary for true community to begin to emerge in a group.

Creating Sacred Space

When men gather to do intentional soul work, that work which touches the depths of who they are as men, and which addresses the relational dimensions of men's lives as husbands, fathers, and friends, sacred space is being created. Sacred space is wherever the emotional, spiritual and psychological conditions exist for men to freely voice their fears of failure and weakness, their sense of isolation, their loneliness, their grief, their shame and their anger. It is sacred in part because there are few places where such vulnerability is allowed, especially among men.

To be vulnerable means that one "can be wounded."²⁶ Traditional images of God portray "Him" as invulnerable because of "His" nonrelatedness.

In a . . . pioneering work that lays the groundwork for a feminist theology of relationship, Carter Heyward has made clear how far traditional Christian theism has wandered from the central concern with relationality that characterized the faith of the Israelite community and that was so central to Jesus' ministry. She stresses that the basic images of God that emerged in patristic Christianity were

²⁶ "Vulnerable," Webster's New World Dictionary.

devoid of relationship. By stressing that God is "being itself" or is "the wholly other," the Christian tradition implies that a lack of relatedness in God is the source of divine strength. And this image of divine nonrelatedness surely feeds images of self that lead us to value isolation and monadic autonomy.²⁷

Many men have learned to recreate this godlike invulnerability in nonrelatedness. Power, in hierarchical forms of patriarchal religion, is displayed in the ability to maintain a position of invulnerability in relation to others. The powerful exercise control over the lives of the powerless. If God is all-powerful "He" is completely in control and invulnerable. Nothing that happens in all of creation can truly wound "Him." "His" only response to the failings and disobedience of people is anger, and even that "He" is able to control and use at will to either destroy life as it exists or reshape the commitments of "His" people.

By contrast, men are wounded whenever they attempt to embody invulnerability. Such a hierarchical envisioning of life destroys the possibility of mutual relationship. The gender identification of God as male only serves to further cut men off from the woundedness of their own experience. Men cannot feel powerful in the midst of their

²⁷ Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality, eds. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 221. Reference is to Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

isolation from others and from the truest parts of themselves. Men can only be empowered when they begin to accept the vulnerability they feel and are willing to make it the basis for relationship with others and with the world. Men, therefore, need to re-envision traditional masculine images of God. God can no longer be made in man's image. Images of God are needed which reflect God's deeply felt responsiveness to the suffering and destruction which mar life as we know it.

The vulnerability felt by men but seldom expressed is the basis upon which a man discovers his authentic self in relation to others and the world. Vulnerability kept carefully hidden is debilitating and creates a sense of inadequacy in a man's self-identity. Vulnerability shared in trusted community is freeing and creates a sense of renewed hope that a man is able to become more fully human in relationship. Jesus' incarnational ministry was precisely for the purpose of calling out our full humanity as it is discovered in community.

The women in men's lives are more likely to be witness to the vulnerable side of men, and yet they too fall into the trap of labeling weakness or failure as only negative because of the anxiety these human qualities create. "But what happens to a man when he is not allowed the humanizing

experience of failure and defeat?" asks Francis Weller.²⁸ The answer is that the man "loses soul" and becomes what Weller calls a "prisoner of perfection." He goes on to describe many of the men who see him in his psychotherapy practice as having "little feeling of the sacred and often even less of a sense of what it is that moves them, what they long for, or what it is that weighs on them so heavily."²⁹

The paradox within true community may be expressed, in the words of the apostle Paul, "whenever I am weak, then I am strong."³⁰ There is strength to be found in one's own weaknesses and in the weaknesses of others when such weaknesses are valued for what one might learn from them. Thus, to be present in the midst of men's vulnerabilities is to be in a sacred space.

Another important element in creating sacred space is silence--silence in the place of activity, silence in the midst of pain and grief, silence of inner work, silence that is honored, "silence that speaks without words."³¹

²⁸ Weller, 69.

²⁹ Ibid., 70.

³⁰ 2 Cor. 12:10b, NRSV.

³¹ World Council of Churches, Jesus Christ--the Life of the World: Worship Book for the Sixth Assembly (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 94, cited in Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Meeting in the Silence: Meditation as the Center of Congregational Life," in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 141.

Being in the silence of others with them is a way of honoring their need to process their immediate experiencing. It acknowledges that a deep connecting is occurring within the person. Mary Elizabeth Moore speaks of finding the center of congregational life in the silence of meditation. She writes,

Sometimes we need to be silent in a conversation in order to listen to others. Such a practice can move us away from classifying people and creation. It moves us in the direction of being a community with one another and with the earth--a community that listens and receives and appreciates the gifts of one another. In such a community persons can receive the gifts of God more fully as they listen to voices other than their own.³²

A group of men is also a community in need of a center, and silence is an apt image of how a sacred space is carved out of otherwise highly scheduled lives.

Prayer is important as well. But it is prayer seen in broad perspective as integrally bound up in the mundane daily activities of life. In fact, our lives may be lived prayers to the extent that we are open to the presence of the holy mystery that is life itself. The meditations I offered to the group of men with whom I met were designed to bring us deeper into ourselves and our bodies in the present moment, to open us to a life-renewing presence beyond and yet within ourselves, and to connect our very breathing to the rhythms of the One who breathes into us

³² Mary Elizabeth Moore, 147.

the breath of life with each waking moment. This is prayer, not what we say so much as how we respond to the gifts of life and community. Sacred space invites the holy into our midst and our selves into the holy. Sacred space invites the holy into our relationships. Meditative prayer leads us in this direction.

Drawing on the Faith Tradition

The roots of patriarchy within the Christian faith tradition are problematic when seeking religious resources for use with a men's group. The First Testament reveals a patriarchal social and religious context in which people are expendable for the sake of a supposed divinely-sanctioned national purpose. This is not unlike the goals and rationale of the military-industrial complex in our own nation.³³ Nor are its parallels with the rising intolerance directed at immigrants, the gay community and others who are different from the dominant social groups difficult to see.

In the Second Testament, it is clear that Christianity did not successfully oppose "the very ancient and

³³ For example, the lack of American grief and mourning for the Iraqi dead in the aftermath of the Gulf War, both civilians and soldiers, is indicative of the dehumanizing effects of sanitized war. The cause is declared morally just and right, which permits an easy expendability of those in the way.

widespread system of male domination"³⁴ known as patriarchy. "Indeed, quite early on, Christianity was already taken over by men and made to serve patriarchy."³⁵ Feminine images of God, such as the "tradition of the maternal office of the Holy Spirit, the divine motherhood," were suppressed and "subsequently driven out of the mainline men's church."³⁶

The effect of this failure to challenge patriarchy was that the Church's power for liberation was diminished for women and men alike. Men as well as women have suffered under the ongoing sanction of patriarchy by the Church, although for different reasons. Of particular relevance for this project is the dualistic effect of this unchallenged form of hierarchy in the lives of men.

Patriarchy cut the male in half. It split him into a subject, consisting of reason and will, and an object, consisting of heart, feelings, and physical needs. He had to identify himself with the former and keep his distance from the latter. This isolated the male and brought about a certain self-hatred. This division in the male is reflected and takes an aggressive form in the male subjugation and domination of the supposedly "frail," "emotional," and "physical" women.³⁷

The benefits of patriarchy for men--power and privilege--are in tension with the suffering they also experience in

³⁴ Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jurgen Moltmann, Humanity in God (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), 112.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 117.

³⁷ Ibid., 113.

having to dissociate from qualities of themselves which are not popularly conceived of as being consistent with male sexual identity.

John Stoltenberg prefers the more honest term male supremacy to patriarchy. By male supremacy he means, "the social system of rigid dichotomization by gender through which people born with penises maintain power in the culture over and against the sex caste of people who were born without penises."³⁸ Sexual objectification, through which men are predisposed to express their sexuality by reducing other persons to objects they desire, is closely linked in function and intent to male supremacy. He writes,

The relationship of sexual objectification to male supremacy works in two mutually reinforcing ways: (1) Men's habit of sexually objectifying serves in part to construct the male supremacy of culture, and (2) the male supremacy of culture urges males to adapt by adopting the habit of sexually objectifying. This habit becomes as strong as it does in each man's lifetime precisely because the habit serves most forcefully to locate his sense of himself as a peer in relation to the supremacy he perceives in other males. Once he knows that location palpably, he knows what can be called a male sexual identity--a sense of himself as having dissociated sufficiently from the inferior status of females.³⁹

Boys begin to learn these lessons early in their lives amid the confusion and anxiety which often accompany their

³⁸ John Stoltenberg, Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice (1989; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 50.

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

search to identify themselves completely with maleness and disidentify with the femaleness represented most nearly in mother. Stoltenberg tells of the process familiar to most boys whereby their primary sexual identity is formed.

It's a familiar story: You grow up to become a boy and you are terrorized into acting like a boy and you are rewarded for being a boy and you learn to dissociate from your mother by adopting a whole range of fears and hatreds of women and you learn what you need to learn to be accepted into the company of other men. Women shore up this identity; we look to women to affirm this identity. But we get the identity from other men; it is other men we look to as the arbiters of sex-class identity, the identity that gets inside of us, an identity so close to who we think we are that letting go of it scares us to death.⁴⁰

Stoltenberg goes on to offer the helpful distinction between two ways of entering into knowledge of one's identity: sex-class identity, described above, and moral identity. Moral identity springs from that part of men which wants to be in relationships marked by mutuality, respect, caring, fairness, and gender justice. Moral identity has a relational quality, particularly in its concern that justice be applied in the world.

It's that part of ourselves which is capable of weighing what we see, what we do, what other people do, in terms of some sense we have of what justice should look like. It's a part of ourselves that is capable also of living beyond gender, and it sometimes does. It's also the part of ourselves that is nearest our experience when we are feeling deep remorse and pain over the suffering and injustice that we see in the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 194.

world.⁴¹

Men's difficulty in developing a richly textured emotional life and maintaining mutual connections with others may be fairly traced to this ancient patriarchal system. Patriarchy, as a socially constructed cultural system of male privilege, is also a systemic form of oppression in which the historic oppressors--men--have suffered the alienation of having cut themselves off from their own authentic selves and inner lives. Both the oppressed and the oppressor are dehumanized in the process.

This alienation is also reflected in the images of a God with predominantly male traits.

The distress of the divided and isolated male is reflected in the majesty of the God of patriarchy. This God is the Almighty, the Ruler, the Absolute. This God determines everything and is not influenced by anything. This God is incapable of suffering. . . . A God who is no more than "the Almighty" is not a God but a monster. Any man who emulates this God becomes a hapless beast; he is no more than an expression of the will to power.⁴²

Patriarchy, insidious to the ongoing forms of Christianity, is thus self-destructive and destructive of human relatedness with God and others.

There is hope, however, that in "leaving the monotheistic God of rulers and males behind us, we shall discover from the sources of Christianity the God who is in

⁴¹ Ibid., 195.

⁴² Moltmann-Wendel and Moltmann, 114.

relationship, the God who can suffer, the uniting God, the God of . . . community."⁴³ This is the God who is not invulnerable or unaffected by the suffering men cause to themselves and others by leaving the roots of patriarchy unchallenged in their own lives. "This is the living God, the God of life, who was distorted through a patriarchal system with its idols of power and domination. In this living God the male too will experience deliverance from the distortions which he himself has suffered and still suffers under patriarchy."⁴⁴

Keeping this critique in view, is it still possible to utilize some of Scripture's stories purposefully in a group of men? A story such as Abraham with Isaac on the mountaintop on the verge of sacrificing his son might be reimagined in light of the sacrifice of young men in battle, on the streets, or in the arena of sports. A story such as Jacob and Esau fighting over their father's blessing might be reimagined in light of the hunger for the father's blessing within contemporary men. In other words, there are possibilities in this use of Scriptures, and yet the context in which they were told is important as well.

Not only the context, but also the preconceptions many people carry with them from repeated childhood hearings, make it difficult to hear these stories in fresh and

⁴³ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112-13.

imaginative ways. Nonetheless, the use of the Scriptures can be a useful device in raising men's consciousness about the power inherent in the father-son bond and of the ways images of God are shaped in relation to this bond.

In addition, the wealth of stories contained within Hebrew and Christian Scriptures about the experiences of women, men, and children with the sacred in life contain profound examples of disconnection within human relationships. These stories are food for thought whenever one is involved in encouraging the type of relational connections that will be redemptive and healing for men.

Other resources drawn from the faith tradition, such as silence in meditation, prayer and intentional community-building, have been discussed above. Theological reflection is able to provide insights into the meaning of guilt, shame, alienation, sin, and forgiveness--all important topics from a relational perspective. Ritual has possible uses as well, particularly if a ritual reflecting the members' ongoing connectedness with one another was to be developed with which the group could end each session. This might take the form of a prayer spoken in unison while arms rest on one another's shoulders.

Perhaps more important than the explicit use of any particular resources of the faith tradition is the ability of the group leader to see his faith stance incorporated into the relational context of the group experience. That

is to say, the assumptions of the leader about the activity of the Spirit in human relationships and of the healing potential within that human/divine meeting, are instrumental in allowing the group to be open to the presence of God in their midst.

A Critique of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

I was initially drawn to the literature of the mythopoetic portion of the men's movement because stories and poetry were useful devices in drawing out my own imaginative and creative capacities to address my woundedness. Looking to other men for help in this regard was new for me. Women had been instrumental partners in the process of psychological and spiritual healing for me. Because of my basic distrust of certain cultural forms of masculinity though, which developed for me during childhood, I felt some ambivalence about my own masculine identity.

For me, and I believe for many men of similar social location, masculinity implied being isolated in a highly competitive and uncompromising world--the world which claimed the complete attention and loyalty of men like my father. Perhaps, I thought to myself, if the isolation I feel is the result of being emotionally disconnected from the most important male figure in my life--my father--then the healing is likely to involve a move toward other men and my own inner male experience. By moving in this

direction I hoped to redeem a basis for masculinity in emotional connectedness and vulnerability.

Having said this about what attracted me to the men's movement, there is clearly a downside. I agree with Susan Brooks Thistlewaite's assessment of the strong gender socializations which potentially lead men to reify their own "gender dominance in the name of reclaiming (their) experience."⁴⁵ She asks appropriately: "Given the male dominance Bly and . . . others acknowledge, . . . what safeguards have they put in place in their own methods to keep the new men's movement from merely revivifying a dying patriarchal culture?"⁴⁶

Gloria Steinem (in a foreword written for a feminist collection of essays, Women Respond to the Men's Movement) views Bly as having begun with the notion that men need to explore "the full circle of human qualities within themselves," but then having returned "to the easier sell of old warlike language of kings and battles, closeness only to males and measuring adulthood by men's distance from mothers, thus reconstructing patriarchy albeit in a supposedly gentler form."⁴⁷ In a world where male violence

⁴⁵ Susan Brooks Thistlewaite, "Great White Fathers," Christianity and Crisis 51, no. 19 (Jan. 13, 1992): 416.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gloria Steinem, foreword to Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), viii-ix.

continues to be a problem, especially in domestic settings, new images are needed to promote a healthy sense of responsible and caring masculinity.

Thus it is encouraging to see new visions of maleness being presented by such men as John Stoltenberg, author of Refusing to Be a Man, who pioneered a program in New York city schools "that delighted sixth-grade boys by teaching them to care for babies," and the members of the Oakland Men's Project who provide "nonviolent male role models and strategies to boys"⁴⁸ in an effort to stop male violence. Getting men to be more involved in parenting and childcare, and then to be nurturing and empathic in their father-child interactions, has broad social and political implications. With this in mind, it might be fairly asked whether it is even possible to participate in a group concerned with being good enough fathers without eventually addressing one's responsibility to the larger human community and to the future.

Rosemary Radford Ruether is doubtful of the intent of leaders within the men's movement to present a message to men that is "authentically and adequately a positive complement to the issues of women's oppression that have been identified by the feminist movement."⁴⁹ I too see

⁴⁸ Ibid., viii.

⁴⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?" in Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection,

the need for a men's movement that will work in partnership with women "to create a new society liberated from patriarchy."⁵⁰ She is suspicious of "men's movements that claim to be healing the wounded male psyche by reaffirming 'the masculine.'"⁵¹ Such an approach appears to silently reaffirm existing power relations within a patriarchal social system. I believe, however, that it depends entirely on the way in which masculinity is being defined. When men simply reaffirm traditional forms of masculinity they are doing as she suggests. When men affirm new forms of masculinity which break from traditional privilege and power-over-others and seek partnership and mutual empowerment with others, as some men are doing, it is a sign of hope.

Ruether harshly criticizes the men's movement, remarking, "what is characteristic of its leaders is their emphasis on (white) male intrapsychic self-affirmation in a way that avoids entirely any social awareness of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and class as social injustice."⁵² Rather than locating the problems of men within unjust and unequal power arrangements, a reality that distorts the lives of women and men alike, the men's movement, in her

ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 15-16.

view, has narrowly located the problems men experience in the struggles of adolescence to separate from the strong mother and "reclaim the absent father."⁵³ Her critique is forceful, and perhaps largely true, yet it seems to unfairly generalize a movement as varied as the feminist movement.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, Ruether's critique perpetuates a dualistic model of personal and social transformation, which is precisely what it claims to critique. Men's psychological and spiritual wounds do stem from a centuries-old proclivity toward domination not only of women and children, but of the environment, native peoples, and economic and political structures. It is also possible, however, to look at the emotional forces which operate within family relationships to find some answers to the problems men experience.

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴ I attended the Third Annual Northern California Professional Conference in Santa Rosa, California, May 15-16, 1993, sponsored by the Redwood Men's Center, which had the theme "Deepening the Dialogue Among Male Clinicians," during which the diversity of opinion and vision within the men's movement became increasingly apparent to me. Many issues related to men's psychological well-being and relational health, as these are addressed by psychotherapy and group work, were raised from distinctly different voices. Sam Keen was confronted during the question-and-answer period following his presentation with statements he had made that seemed to reflect heterosexism. Other voices spoke from an explicitly pro-feminist stance. Yet it is true that much of the presentation and discussion focused on men's healing of psychic wounds, seen as related to early enmeshment with their mother and the common experience of an absent father.

Ruether claims to acknowledge the impact of family patterns of relating but accuses the men's movement of being unaware of the "social structures that shape the family," such as "why the family has been structured in such a way as to leave the primary parenting and domestic labor to women."⁵⁵ Too many men are unaware of such social structures. They adopt traditional forms of masculinity which assume that women take care of children and the home. More men, however, are seeking not only to increase their level of involvement in caring for their children but also to be socially aware of the injustices done to women by the family patterns of the past.

Laura Brown is both critical and saddened by all the energy she sees being poured into men's healing the wounds of childhood rather than working toward genuine change in this wounded world. She writes,

There are a variety of dimensions on which I find myself critical of this men's movement, but they seem to cluster along the factor of triviality. Women and children are being beaten and raped at home--by men; air and water are growing more toxic by the moment, thanks to industries owned and run--by men; funding for social programs is being cut to the bone by government dominated--by men. And these guys are getting together to lament that they never knew their fathers!?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ruether, 16.

⁵⁶ Laura S. Brown, "Essential Lies: A Dystopian Vision of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement," in Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: Pandora, 1992), 98.

It may be true that the healing of individuals pales in comparison to the healing needed in the world. Again, however, I don't believe the individual and global can be so readily separated. Brown seems to be arguing that a person cannot operate on more than one level--the personal, the social, the global--at a time. I contend that there is a deeply felt wound inherent in the disconnections men have learned from the dominant male culture. Tracing the disconnections back in a boy's life, one eventually observes the roots of these disconnections in the nature of a boy's relationship with his father. I wonder if such wounds as those created by absent or emotionally distant fathers are truly trivial for either men or women.

A part of the task of men in reconnecting with their fathers in a way which encompasses forgiveness and empathy is to then free them to become more nurturing and involved fathers to their own children. This represents a radical departure from past patterns of male behavior. This is a critique in itself of the former patterns of remote and uninvolved fathering, and will help boys experience forms of masculine identity which encourage emotional connections. The very reason that many men were enmeshed with their mothers is because their fathers were nowhere to be seen, or if they were seen, it was from a distance.

A balance of personal and social transformation is needed in the men's movement. Brown's call for action to

change the world that we know and experience individually and communally is a valid one. Attention "to the need to change the world that is the source of so much of our pain"⁵⁷ needs to be seen as consistent with the need to heal the inner world of men's psyches and souls which have been wounded by the trappings of patriarchy in different but no less profound ways than women's.

Jill Johnston asserts that Bly is not in sympathy with the women's movement but rather is simply interested in helping men recapture their lost power. Along with Susan Faludi, author of Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women, she sees a connection between Bly's concerns about men's loss of a deep sense of masculinity, the role of fathers and elder men in reestablishing manhood's place, and a rise in ill will toward feminism in recent years. Writes Johnston,

Bly became a champion of men at a time when many males were enduring a crisis of masculine identity in the wake of feminism. He and others . . . began seeing what they euphemistically called 'soft males'--limp men with low self-esteem and a heightened vulnerability to women, men suffering a remoteness from their fathers and a feminization of sorts because of the women's movement.⁵⁸

Johnston makes a valid point here about the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Jill Johnston, "Why Iron John Is No Gift to Women," New York Times Book Review, 23 Feb. 1992, 28. Cited in Robert L. Griswold, Fatherhood in America: A History (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 267.

understanding of gender in much of the men's movement, although her argument seems a bit overdrawn. It is true that the predominantly white middle-class men who comprise the men's movement are not victims of oppression. There is, however, a genuine sense of loss around the physical or emotional absence of fathers that demands attention in men's lives if they are to be the kinds of husbands and fathers they want to be.

Thus the mythopoetic arm of the men's movement does not warrant unconditional support. Clearly, there is sufficient reason to want to move beyond the limited scope of psychological healing to address the healing of society and of the planet. In sympathy with Johnston's general point, Griswold claims that

despite Bly's protestations, his movement is not on a parallel track with feminism nor does it understand feminism's central insight. Gender is historically and socially constructed. Thus, Bly's ahistorical, unchanging, natural poles of "masculine" and "feminine" to which people allegedly gravitate are little more than mythopoetic tropes that shore up rather than tear down male dominance. Finding lost fathers may only multiply the number of men who control women.⁵⁹

Finding lost fathers, in particular men's inwardly created fathers who are moving toward mutually empowering and empathic relationships, might equally be expected to free men from the deep loss they feel in order that they may relate more passionately with the ones they love. In

⁵⁹ Griswold, 267.

other words, the absence of a man's actual father in life stirs him to create an internally felt father like the one he has always wanted and needed. This strong and nurturing internal father image potentially matures in relation to both a man himself and his children over time. If this were not a possibility, there would be insufficient reason to attempt to utilize the power of story and poetry to touch and transform men's lives.

CHAPTER 5

Model for a Father's Group

Having discussed the nature of men's woundedness, having considered what Self-in-relation theory has to say about how relational connections heal, and having looked at the resources of the faith tradition and pastoral ministry, we now turn our attention to an actual design for a men's group focused on fathering. The group design presented here is not based solely on one counseling approach or theory. In fact, as will become clear, the group envisioned is not strictly a counseling or therapy group. It combines the goals and functions of three different types of groups into one group.

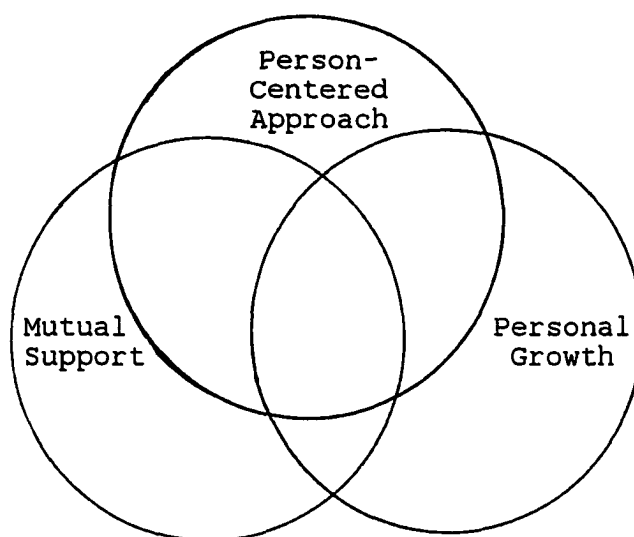
Specifically, this group combines elements of mutual support, personal growth, and a person-centered approach to group counseling. It also takes into account the healing factors inherent in a relational approach which fosters mutually empowering and empathic connections. Raising consciousness around gender-role issues, particularly as these relate to men in families, is also considered as part of the personal growth dimension.¹

Theoretical Approach to Group Counseling

There is an area of overlap among various types of

¹ See Frederic E. Rabinowitz and Sam V. Cochran's helpful chapter "Counseling Men in Groups" in Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy With Men, eds. Murray Scher et al. (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987), 51-67.

groups. Thus, combining elements of mutual support, personal growth, and a person-centered approach, means working within the area these models have in common. The diagram below may clarify what the author has in mind.



Of course, the goals of such groups, as well as the role of the counselor/facilitator, vary according to each of these models of group work. They are not, however, incompatible with one another in their basic emphases. Each of the three elements assume the responsibility of individual participants in using the group process in a way that will help them and acknowledge the resources that are available within the individual and the group itself for growth and healing. Let us further consider these three elements to our combined approach one at a time.

In a Mutual Support group, members share their experiences along with the accompanying thoughts and

feelings they have in relation to these experiences. Both the personal sharing and the listening to others' experiences help to cultivate the sense of supportive community within the group. Mutuality is partially realized in the discovery "that other people struggle with the same issues, feel similar emotions, and think similar thoughts."² The role of the facilitator is to encourage personal sharing in others and to participate fully as a member of the group, modeling the sort of self-disclosure and empathic listening desired in all participants.

A Growth group seeks to increase members' awareness of self and others through honest sharing and listening. Usually members develop personal goals for their work within the group having to do with issues they are currently confronting. For members of the Father's group under discussion, the overarching goal is made clear in the name and description of the group, namely, to work with men in clarifying how they wish to be fathers with their children. Growth is made possible in the sharing of alternative visions for what fathering is and can be. Some of the assumptions behind our accepted models of parenting are challenged. Growth occurs as consciousness is raised during discussion about men's personal priorities, values, and commitments.

² Edward E. Jacobs, Riley L. Harvill, and Robert L. Masson. Group Counseling: Strategies and Skills (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1988), 7.

The person-centered approach to group counseling, is based on the assumption that human beings tend to move toward wholeness when provided with the appropriate conditions. This approach emphasizes the personal qualities of the facilitator over counseling techniques, and sees the facilitator as one who establishes an atmosphere enabling healing and growth to occur. Such an atmosphere is established "by creating a relationship based on certain attitudes such as accurate empathic understanding, acceptance, positive regard, warmth, caring, respect, genuineness, immediacy, and self-disclosure."³

This approach is non-directive, more so than I wish to be in the father's group under discussion. My concern that fathers take their responsibility to their families seriously, and that they see the connections between their experiences with their own fathers and being a father themselves, means that there is an agenda within the context of meeting together. Even so, in the interactions of the group, in the honored silences, and in the respectful sharing of personal stories there is the potential for healing and growth through meeting. An attractive element of this approach is that the therapeutic relationship is a potentially transforming event for all participants, including the counselor who is willing to be

³ Gerald Corey, Theory and Practice of Group Counseling, 2nd ed. (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1985), 247.

changed.

Group Process and the Counselor's Role

Gerald Corey considers the key concepts of the person-centered approach to group work to be found in the individual's own resources for self-understanding and capacity for change and in the therapist's attitudes of genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding.⁴ Genuineness refers to the extent to which the facilitator becomes involved personally in the group, sharing feelings and thoughts which he is experiencing. It "means that what the therapist expresses externally is congruent with his or her inner experience."⁵ Still, there are appropriate boundaries to the practice of self-disclosure. Gerald Egan offers the following guidelines for appropriate counselor self-disclosure:

Sharing yourself is appropriate if it helps clients achieve the treatment goals outlined in this helping process--that is, if it helps them talk about themselves, if it helps them talk about problem situations more concretely, if it helps them develop new perspectives and frames of reference, and if it helps them set realistic goals for themselves.⁶

Appropriate self-disclosure is important to the group process I envision for this father's group. As a

⁴ Ibid., 249.

⁵ Ibid., 255.

⁶ Gerald Egan, The Skilled Helper: A Model for Systematic Helping and Interpersonal Relating, 2nd ed. (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1982), cited in Corey, 255.

participant, a pastoral counselor, and the facilitator, it seems important to risk the sort of vulnerability which is so difficult for men to show to other men if I want others to risk such self-disclosure. Genuineness or congruence is an essential attitude for the counselor in a group of men if a depth of personal sharing conducive to growth and change is to be established. An authentic relationship between the counselor and the men in the group is perhaps the most important element in this approach to group counseling. This is consistent with the relational approach to group work discussed by proponents of self-in-relation theory. The relationship itself, characterized by mutuality and empathic understanding, makes healing, growth, and change possible in all the persons involved.

The attitude of positive regard toward members of the group "involves communicating a caring that is unconditional and that is not contaminated by evaluation or judgment" of their feelings and thoughts.⁷ Because feelings are often difficult for men to express, and men tend to intellectualize when the feelings become intense, it is especially important for the leader to communicate a caring respect for men when they are getting in touch with their feelings and attempting to communicate them.

Genuine caring is nonpossessive, that is, it doesn't insist upon a certain response according to the counselor's

⁷ Corey, 253.

needs.⁸ Rather, it communicates a deep and underlying acceptance of the person and the group in all the interactions which take place. Corey points out, however, that acceptance is not the same as approval of all behavior.⁹ When an atmosphere of mutual trust and warmth has been established it is possible and even necessary to demonstrate the nature of authentic relating through confrontation of behavior which is counterproductive to the purposes of the group, harmful to individual members, or harmful to persons over whom men have power in the world. In this way the group is encouraged to move to a deeper level of relating with one another through a process of helping them take a look at the effects of their current behavior.

Empathy, according to the person-centered approach to counseling, is the "ability to enter the subjective world" of another, "assuming the internal frame of reference of that person," and then being able to accurately communicate one's understanding of "the feelings and personal meanings" that the person is experiencing.¹⁰ Carl Rogers speaks of accurate, empathic understanding as an essential condition

⁸ In fact, Corey helpfully suggests that "group leaders need to develop an accepting attitude toward themselves as well--an acceptance of the fact that at times they won't feel a high level of warmth or unconditional positive regard." (Ibid., 254)

⁹ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰ Ibid., 251, 249.

for developing a genuinely helpful therapeutic relationship. He writes, "To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality--this is empathy."¹¹

Self-in-relation theory sees this happening when boundaries are relaxed to the extent that one can feel and think with another in their own inner subjective world for a period of time, even while maintaining an awareness of one's own world. Hearing the feelings of isolation, fear, anger, grief, sadness--to name only a few of the feelings that emerge in men's groups--has the potential of putting the counselor in touch with their own experiences in life which have evoked similar feelings. When this subjective connection is made, an empathic understanding can be experienced and communicated in a way which leads to healing and growth.

Healing Factors in the Relational Approach

A relational model of group counseling derived from self-in-relation theory seeks to create mutually empathic and growth-producing connections among group members through the group's process. Whereas many psychological theories emphasize individuation and separation as signs of developmental maturing, the "relational approach stresses ongoing, mutual, empathic connection as central to

¹¹ Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 284.

psychological well-being."¹² The focus is on the strengths of persons within relationship rather than on psychopathology.

In the establishing of new connections with others on an emotional level it is possible to overcome earlier adaptive behavior in relation to the disconnections one has experienced. For men, who as boys became disconnected from their mothers in order not to be a "momma's boy" and were never able to connect emotionally with their fathers, the healing power of renewed connections is especially needed. This is true for many men in American society due to the inherent disconnections of growing up in a gendered environment where it was clear that boys must be strong and aggressive and self-assured if they hoped to succeed in life.

The need to be connected in mutually empowering and empathic relationships able to nourish one's soul was neither demonstrated nor taught to boys by parents of previous generations. Girls learned to value relationships and to be empathic by watching their mothers respond to the needs and feelings of others. Boys learned to disown their feelings, to disconnect from others, and to relate on the basis of competitive skill and developed expertise. It is important that men seek to establish new connections in

¹² Nicolina M. Fedele and Elizabeth A. Harrington, Women's Groups: How Connections Heal, Work in Progress, no. 47 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1990), 2.

their lives in order to counteract this prior learning with a healthier way of relating that will contribute to their psychological and spiritual well-being.

Most theoretical frameworks suggest certain curative factors which originate in the practice of that particular theory. Four healing factors have been proposed based on the work of self-in-relation theorists. These factors are interrelated and are only separated for the sake of discussion. They are based on experience in women's groups, but also have implications for working with men in groups. These healing factors include "validation of one's experience, empowerment to act in relationships, development of self-empathy, and mutuality."¹³

These are of value to men who are fathers because of the patterns of disconnection which develop between fathers and their children (perhaps especially sons) because of competing expectations and cultural values. In the healing experience of relating differently with other men lies the power to transform the other relationships of men's lives, those with their partners, their children, and co-workers, and their friends. Of primary concern in this project is the relationship between father and sons, for this is where much of the role modeling for masculinity is accomplished in growing boys. As men change the nature of their relating with other men and are accepted and encouraged in

¹³ Ibid., 3.

these changes, father wounds are healed, and men are freed to an involved and nurturing fathercare with their children.

The four healing factors will be discussed here one at a time, along with a reflection on their applicabilty to men who are fathers.

Validation as a Healing Factor

Fedele and Harrington suggest that "women's needs for intimacy and connection are frequently devalued in their marriages and families."¹⁴ Men, on the other hand, seldom even recognize their needs for intimacy and connection because they believe they are supposed to be self-sufficient. Yet men's emotional lives, when encouraged, are potentially rich sources for relating with others. They need a safe place, however, to share their emotional experience--a place where it will be acknowledged and thereby validated as being important. This need for sharing is also true of the experience of being a father in today's world and all of the emotional and practical struggles that surround this responsibility. As men share their worries, fears, and dreams, for their children, they invite others to make connection with them.

In looking at past relationships, especially those with their fathers, men potentially re-experience the pain of the absent, abusive, or neglectful father, only this

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

time they are not alone. This time a community of other men is there to listen to their story, to feel with them in the telling of it, to wait with them in the silence of not knowing how they will survive, and to offer the healing of connection. In this way, the "emotional resonance" a man feels with the therapist or other members of the group helps him "to understand the meaning systems around (his) pain."¹⁵ The pain is validated, the man is validated, and the relationship is validated.

Empowerment as a Healing Factor

Women's capacities to exercise their own power are often diminished by the social and familial contexts in which they find themselves. Thus women benefit from relationships which are characterized by the mutually empowering "capacity both to be moved by and to move the other person."¹⁶ There is an empowering effect in seeing that another person is moved by your openness and honesty in self-disclosure. This effect becomes mutual when you allow the other person within relationship to also have an impact upon you and the way you see yourself.

For men, whose power has traditionally been exercised in a model of power over persons and events, power which is realized through relational means is radically different. Power in connections contrasts sharply with power in

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

disconnections. Disconnections in relationship have allowed men, as husbands, fathers, and friends, to create the appearance of relationship while remaining relatively separate and unchanged by the other persons in their lives. It is less true that men are unmoved by events, such as during wartime when buddies get wounded or killed, or during the intensity of competitive sports. Events such as these instill a sense of shared purpose in men, but not necessarily a sense of connectedness.

Thus for men, the empowering effect of a relational approach to mutual power lies in the discovery that there is a different way to relate with other men, a way based on respectful listening. Instead of listening with divided attention, thinking about how one will respond, one responds with listening. When one is truly able to listen, the possibility of feeling the effect of the other's sharing is enhanced. Whereas men have more often than women enjoyed the feeling of being empowered in the world of work, where male privilege has long dominated the scene, men have also felt a lack of relational power because their interpersonal skills have been based more on managing others than relating to them.

In a men's group a different model is offered. Men learn to relate in mutually empowering ways when they are able to discard the traditional power over model, replacing it with respectful and empathic sharing. The role of the

facilitator is crucial is setting the tone through his leadership since there is an inherent power differential which exists by virtue of this separate role. For this reason, in men's groups perhaps even more than in women's groups, the exercise of shared leadership may have special merit.

Self-empathy as a Healing Factor

Judith Jordan has described self-empathy as "a phenomenon which occurs when the observing self makes empathic contact with the experiencing self," and also more recently as "empathy for what is human in ourselves."¹⁷ This factor is important for men meeting together because part of the resistance within men stems from a feeling of inadequacy in comparison with other men. The competitive, power-over model is never too far from consciousness for most men. Men learn that forgetting this is at their own peril.

The interrelatedness of empathy for others and self-empathy seems evident as men struggle to relate to one another and to themselves in a more humanizing manner. As a man is able to "experience emotional resonance with another person's empathy" for him, he is able to feel more

¹⁷ Ibid., 5. See a discussion of Jordan's position in "Empathy and Self-Boundaries," and in Judith V. Jordan, Relational Development: Therapeutic Implications of Empathy and Shame, Work in Progress, no. 39 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1989).

connected with his own affect.¹⁸ In turn, he is freed to allow his own empathic understandings of others' experiences to be expressed within the relative safety of the group. It is hoped that as a result of a man's experience within the group, he will also place increasing value on relating in mutually empowering and empathic ways in other relationships, particularly those within his family.

The pain of growing up male is not to be minimized. For Shepherd Bliss, whose father was in the military, life as a boy was marred by the absences of his father, beginning at the crucial moment of birth. Bliss writes of his father: "When he was home, he was emotionally distant. I never remember him touching me, except in anger. No playing ball or taking me fishing. I followed his model by taking off as soon as I could."¹⁹ The pain of a father's absence is replayed daily in a multitude of boy's lives. The dilemma for a growing boy is how to think and feel about himself when his father doesn't seem to want to be with him. The process of self-empathy may open the way for a man to understand the meaning of his boyhood experiences in a new, more empathic way. The observing self brings the emotionally laden events of the past's experiencing self

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Shepherd Bliss, "My War Story: A Child's Trauma," in Boyhood, Growing Up Male, 13.

into the present empathic relationship with other men. Healing occurs as the present self develops "compassion for the vulnerabilities of the past self."²⁰ For in most cases the sense of vulnerability is actually very present in men's lives even if it is carefully hidden from view. In learning to trust other men with their deeper selves, and to trust themselves, men open the way toward healing the wounds of the past. Father may not have been there, but these men are here now, and they will come back.

Mutuality as a Healing Factor

Jordan understands mutuality in terms of an intersubjectivity which exhibits "an interest in, attunement to, and responsiveness to the subjective, inner experience of the other at both a cognitive and affective level."²¹ In light of this understanding, Fedele and Harrington offer the following additional insights:

Mutuality involves an appreciation of the wholeness of the other person's experience and respect for the other person's differentness and uniqueness. It also involves an openness to the other's impact on oneself and an appreciation of one's impact on the other. Mutuality values enhancement of the other's growth and, most importantly, leaves all participants open to change.²²

Within the context of a group of fathers and fathers-to-be mutuality means recognizing the different experiences of

²⁰ Fedele and Harrington, 5.

²¹ Jordan, "Meaning of Mutuality," 82.

²² Fedele and Harrington, 5.

woundedness men bring with them and how these experiences affect their relationships with their spouses and children.

Beyond simple recognition, however, is the need to honor men for their willingness to look at the pain they have felt and to share it with other men. The impact of this sort of truth-telling is profound. Men who normally are not at a loss for words become silent. Then, tentatively at first, there is a reaching out with understanding and empathy. The role of the facilitator is to "set the stage for nonjudgmental listening and understanding."²³

Disconnections, the antithesis of mutuality, are what most men have learned in the male world, and they have lead to deep psychological and spiritual wounding. Mothers and wives unwittingly perpetuate men's disconnections in the world when they accept culturally-prescribed models for male competence and success and value these for the men in their lives over a more relational model. In other words, men are not the only ones who embrace disconnection as a way of being in the world. Women sometimes embrace it too as a necessary accomodation to the demands of modern living.

Mutuality presents a challenge to men and women alike to seek new ways of making connections with others, and in so doing to participate in relationships which enhance

²³ Ibid., 6.

growth and change in all who are involved. There is a note of hope when men dare to speak of the wounds they have experienced because of disconnections in both childhood and adulthood.

As the group's relational context provides new opportunities for mutually enhancing exchanges, it can remobilize the growth-oriented relational capacities within each member. Gradually, over time, experiences of mutuality can dismantle and clear away the "scar tissue" that formed as a consequence of disconnections. The group's relational context can provide a rich and safe medium for healing in connection and the development of new patterns of relationship.²⁴

Developing the capacities in men for mutuality and connectedness has broad implications for the nature and practice of their fathercare, particularly with their sons. Fathers may choose to raise their sons according to a more intentionally relational set of values. Through a father's empathy a son learns a lesson that will last a lifetime: the value of relationships characterized by mutuality and empathy.

Storytelling and the Healing Imagination

One technique for putting men in touch with their own fatherly feelings--that is, their generativity, nurturance, caring, and empathy--is through storytelling. Telling stories--whether fairy tales, myths, folk stories, real life accounts of men's experiences, or stories from Scripture--has the potential of connecting men with parts

²⁴ Ibid.

of themselves they have disowned. In stories men encounter fear, failure, anxiety, uncertainty, ambivalence, and vulnerability. In stories men face the danger of not knowing who they are, what they want, and how they will choose to live in relation to the story's impact upon them. In stories men confront the hidden parts of themselves, discover the best parts of themselves, and begin to heal the wounded parts of themselves. Stories evoke images of the internal processes occurring in men's lives as they struggle with failures of intimacy, friendship, or fatherhood.

George Taylor says of myths and fairy tales,

We see men and women in large families in which children, parents, lovers, and uncles are portrayed in relationship. The complexity of the father-son, father-mother, brother-brother interactions stimulates us. We are forced to ask ourselves, How would I act or feel?²⁵

These are potent questions for those who would listen to stories through their imaginative capacities. How would the listener act? How would the listener feel? The dilemmas and struggles portrayed in many stories have their parallels in ordinary human existence. The similarity evokes memory of a past, present, or future problem to be faced by the listener. Thoughts concerning possible actions to address this problem, or feelings surrounding

²⁵ George Taylor, "Why Use Myths and Fairy Tales?" in Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement, ed. Christopher Harding (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 122.

it, emerge in the process of putting oneself into the story through the use of imagination.

It is especially important for men, in listening to stories, to be encouraged to turn off the male tendencies to dissect, analyze and rationalize, and listen with their imaginations. The imagination is the pathway toward the recovery of soul in a man's life. When a group of men become analytical with respect to a particular story being told, the facilitator needs to remind the group to listen and respond out of their imaginative capacities. In time, such reminders will prove unnecessary because men will begin to see the value in approaching stories differently, and will be able to remind themselves and each other.

Michael Meade says of the connection between the imagination and storytelling,

The imagination is intrigued with story--story is the movement of images, the flow of the imagination, the movement of the psyche and the movement of the emotions--and stories are the container in which we talk about soul. In some way, the soul starts to awaken if a story--a real story--is being told. It is heard with the soul.²⁶

Thus, it might be said that imaginal space is sacred space, where men's souls are drawn to the meanings of a story for their own story and are changed inwardly as a result of opening anew to their own capacity to imagine.

²⁶ See John Lang and Anthony Signorelli, "Renewing of the Flesh: Michael Meade on Storytelling," in Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement, ed. Christopher Harding (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 146.

It is not necessary to know all the details of the story in order for one detail to have meaning and be the springboard for deeper reflection. In fact, if one detail captures a man's imagination, it is presenting a valuable clue to some aspect of the man's soul or his relationships which is crying for his attention. This manner of using stories is sometimes called the "door into the story" because the details are used to connect with some part of the listener's experience in the present or past.²⁷ There are dangers in the use of stories. One is that stories will serve as a means for men to stay in their heads and remain isolated not only from their own inner experience but also from that of other men in the group. Another is that men will stay in the story and not connect it with real life situations in order to change them.

Effective group facilitation means calling the group back to the impact the story has on them in the present moment and an exploration of men's accompanying feelings and attitudes in relation to the story. Another danger mentioned by Taylor is that the stories often originate in a patriarchal world and the male characters perpetuate patriarchal attitudes. In listening to the stories and myths then, men need to recognize the unacceptable nature of the domination of women which is sometimes portrayed. Taylor writes,

²⁷ Taylor, 123.

Men have a lot of feeling about the lack of current models of equal, powerful relationship; truth telling on this topic provides an opportunity for men to heal and grow as they express the need for more models of loving behavior, especially between the sexes.²⁸

The facilitator is responsible for raising this issue in group member's consciousness if necessary.

The use of accounts written by contemporary men of their experiences growing up, or with their own children, is slightly different from the use of other types of stories. These are real life stories of men coming to terms with their fathers, with their own role as father, and with their sense of manhood in a world in which the definitions are varied and in flux. Imaginative capacities are still called upon, however, in order to connect with some detail or details of what a particular author is saying about his experience of being a son, a father, a husband, or a man.

Forming the Father's Group

In forming a group for fathers it was necessary to get the word out through various forms of publicity, word of mouth and personal invitations. Several copies of a promotional flyer (see Appendix A) were mailed along with a cover letter to area churches about four weeks before the start of the group. These churches represented a cross-section of protestant denominations, some from a free

²⁸ Ibid., 125.

church tradition, and Roman Catholic parishes. Also represented were churches with ethnic ministries and/or congregations and historically black churches.

Some of the churches, in particular the United Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the Imperial Valley, included notices of the upcoming group meetings in their newsletters and bulletins. Copies of the flyer were also sent to one of the local counseling centers, with an accompanying letter suggesting its use as an adjunct for therapy with male clients who were dealing with family issues. The flyer stated that an interview would be necessary with all prospective group members to see if this group would meet their needs at this time. My phone numbers were listed. In addition, an item ran in the county-wide newspaper briefly describing the group and giving my name and phone number.

I was a little surprised to receive no phone calls during the first three weeks or so after this information was disseminated. I had expected to get at least a few inquiries, and yet figured that much of the turnout would depend upon personal invitations to men I knew in my church, in the community, and through other social and professional contacts. As it turned out, four out of five of the group members were men I knew and had personally invited, and the fifth was referred to the group by a clergy colleague who was counseling with him. One was a

member of my church.

It was disappointing not to have any racial or ethnic diversity represented in the group, especially in a county that is roughly seventy-five percent hispanic. In fact, three of the group members were fluent in spanish and were involved in ministry or teaching with the spanish-speaking population. But, alas, we were all middle-class, white males in our thirties. We also had no diversity in terms of sexual preference. Perhaps the description of the group was not appealing to men with different cultural understandings of fatherhood and masculinity.

The group which assembled was typical of men's groups, even though the focus of our meeting together was to be on our own fathering. One member had a Ph.D. in comparative literature, another was a lawyer, another a Rhodes scholar, another was fluent in Spanish, French and English. It was a highly talented and intelligent mix of men who nonetheless had views on fathering and family that ranged from the traditional to alternative models of raising children.

One participant, a man going through a separation and divorce as we met, was the custodial parent of two young boys, and was clearly enjoying every minute of his time with them. Three others of us had between two and three children, with our wives exercising a greater degree of childcare on a daily basis than we did because they were

not working outside of the home. Two participants did not yet have children, although they and their wives were actively considering it. In one of these situations the man and his wife had discovered a physiological reason preventing them from having children through natural means and they were researching adoption possibilities. Their mourning over the loss of the child they would likely never have was apparent in his sharing.

Several of the men had the ability to speak of feelings freely and to discuss their experiences and hopes of being highly involved fathers with their children. Two of the men, in addition to myself, had some training in counseling. The potential for shared leadership in the facilitation of the group was quite high, providing the basis for the hope that a consistent vision for the exploration of our feelings and attitudes around fathering could be maintained through the group's development.

Outline of Weekly Sessions

The initial six sessions of the fathers' group, representing the beginning stage in the development of a climate of trust and mutual support and caring, were designed to touch upon several issues related to men's relationships with their fathers and to being fathers themselves. An overview of the six sessions is presented here before moving to a more complete outline of each session individually. I gave these titles to the sessions:

Session 1	Talking About Our Fathers
Session 2	Recognizing the Father Wound
Session 3	Descending into the Ashes
Session 4	Creating a Mentoring Community
Session 5	Finding Our Fathers
Session 6	Raising Our Children Well

It was hoped that these guiding images for each week, accompanied by a story and a time of sharing, would elicit the feelings and attitudes and thoughts needing our attention as men and as fathers.

Session 1: Talking About Our Fathers

Guidelines/Rules

I shared with the group my vision of what a group experience offers men as they work at being involved fathers. Group work, I explained, helps men move toward growth and make needed changes in their lives. In order for the trust level to allow for this possibility, three simple guidelines were presented for our times together. These were: (1) Members need to be present at each session; (2) Nothing is to leave the room. Strict confidentiality is expected; and (3) This is intended to be a safe place to speak of any personal issues or concerns, especially as these relate to being a father. There is to be no shaming of others here. I spoke of my belief that the entire process of healing and change requires that we trust one another and trust ourselves. Equally important was that

the men trust me as the group facilitator enough to share their stories and their feelings.

Exercise: Talking about our Fathers²⁹

The men were asked to choose a partner and take a few minutes each to talk about their fathers. Then they were to introduce each other to the group by sharing impressions of the other's father. The "goal was to create an early bonding experience through talking about fathers."³⁰ Also, I believed it would be less threatening in a new setting for participants to make connections with one person as a way of easing into the group experience.

Introduction

I talked briefly about how I arrived at the place of wanting to start a group for men who are fathers or anticipate becoming fathers someday. I referred to what Sam Keen has written of the "vacuum of the missing father who is too busy with 'important' things to enfold them in his arms, too serious to play."³¹

I mentioned Robert Bly's comments about sons having difficulty grasping what it is their fathers do if the father works in an office. There was a day, according to

²⁹ This exercise's use is mentioned in Louis W. McLeod and Bruce K. Pemberton, "Men Together in Group Therapy," in To Be A Man: In Search of the Deep Masculine ed. Keith Thompson (New York: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1991), 239.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Keen, Passionate Life, 48.

Bly, when boys learned a trade or some practical skills from their fathers, or at least took pride in knowing how to work with their hands. The question this raises for us who have sons today is, even if we bring our sons to our office, what can we show them? How we move papers? Referring to a book by German psychologist Alexander Mitscherich called Society Without the Father, Bly remarks, "if the son does not understand clearly, physically what his father is doing during the year and during the day, a hole will appear in the son's perception of his father, and into the hole will rush demons. That's a law of nature; demons rush in because nature hates a vacuum."³²

I mentioned Sam Osherson's conclusion, based on hundreds of interviews with men in their thirties and forties, "that the psychological or physical absence of fathers from their families is one of the great underestimated tragedies of our times."³³ As a result, "boys grow into men with a wounded father within, a conflicted inner sense of masculinity rooted in men's experience of their fathers as rejecting, incompetent, or absent."³⁴ Likewise, William Carlos Williams writes, "The relationship between father and son is one of the toughest

³² Robert Bly, "Father Hunger in Men," in To Be A Man: In Search of the Deep Masculine, ed. Keith Thompson (New York: Tarcher/ Perigee Books, 1991), 190.

³³ Osherson, Finding Our Fathers, 6.

³⁴ Ibid.

things in the world to break down. It seems so natural and it is natural--in fact, it's inevitable--but it separates as much as it joins."³⁵

Excerpts from Letter to my Father

I shared with the men in the group that when I was thirty years old, I wrote my father a letter. It was a painful writing process, because I was flooded by feelings as I wrote. In particular, the grief I felt went way back to all the accumulated memories of times when I wanted to be with my father and he wasn't there. Today with the added perspective of seven years, I see that the grief is one of losing the idealized father image--the stranger in my house who nonetheless provided me with my only real connection to the world of men. He was a mystery to me, I explained, and I built up all sorts of idealized versions of who he was when he himself knew all along that he was only human, and by his own estimation a pretty sad case of humanity at that. He was just as unable to live up to who my imagination told me my father should be as he was unable to meet his own expectations. His own sense of shame also played a part in his failure to live up to my expectations. He saw himself as having failed at everything else, so why not at being a father.

I read portions of my letter to my father, which are

³⁵ Quoted by Donald H. Bell in Being a Man: The Paradox of Masculinity (Lexington, Mass.: Lewis Publishing, 1982), 7.

contained in Chapter 2 on the Father Wound. I explained that, in a way, it was the boy within me who had written this letter, relying upon the adult part of me to take the my feelings and articulate them with some sense of meaning and purpose. I expressed my belief that coming to terms with our fathers is one of the tasks of becoming a man, and by implication, of being an adequate father to our children. This coming to terms also has implications for intimacy with the women we love, for friendship with other men and with women, and for how we treat our children. It has implications for how we feel about ourselves--our self-worth, confidence, ability to feel our feelings, and our comfort at being alone and being with other persons.

Exercise: Expressing Feelings toward our Fathers

Men were asked to take the picture of their fathers they had brought with them, and think about the following questions: What did I want from my father growing up? Did I receive what I wanted? How do I feel about him today? The rationale for this exercise was simply to allow the men to begin to think about their relationship with their fathers intentionally and with an focus upon how that longstanding relationship impacts them today.

Closing of Session

I thanked the men for coming and for their personal sharing. I said that I was very appreciative of what we had begun in this first session and for their active

participation and personal sharing. I expressed my hope that we would build upon this strong beginning and have the kind of group in which we experience mutual support, challenging engagement, and new patterns of relating with other men. I invited the men in the group to share any closing thoughts or feelings about the first session, recognizing that it was probably different from other groups they had experiences. Several of them expressed that they had not been sure what to expect and were pleased with the interaction during this first session. One man in particular said, "This group came at just the right time for me." When everyone had spoken, I said that we would meet again the following week. There was some conversation between individuals before men left for the evening.

Session 2: Recognizing the Father Wound

Guided Meditation

I led the men in a meditation inviting the presence of the life-renewing Spirit of God into our bodies and minds and spirits as we gathered again. The meditation can be found in Appendix B.

Story: "The Frog Princess"³⁶

We listened to this Russian tale in which Ivan, one of three sons to a wealthy merchant, must "marry" (i.e., honor and cherish) the frog-like qualities in himself before he

³⁶ Robert Bly, interview with Michael Toms, The Power Of Shame, audiocassette (Boulder, Col.: Sounds True Recordings, 1991), Side A.

is able to see the inner beauty in that which he deemed ugly. The tragic note is that his timing is off somehow. He destroys his bride's frog skin while she is not there, before he has acknowledged its inherent value for his own development. A transcript of the story from the audiotape can be found in Appendix C.

Written Exercise: "Top Secret"³⁷

Men were asked to write on an index card an embarrassing or humiliating memory they have, preferably one they have not shared with anyone before. I explained the intent of this exercise: that because growing up male in our society is accompanied by many shaming experiences, remembering them and naming them may help us to keep them from being activated in other relationships. I reminded the group of the agreement to avoid shaming we made upon forming the group, and that special care needed to be taken

³⁷ The use of this exercise in men's groups is discussed in Osherson, Wrestling With Love, 25-31, 70-73. He used it in weekend workshops entitled, "Men and Intimacy," which generally had 40 or more participants. The reading of the cards was truly anonymous. The group I was facilitating had six members, and one was unable to think of a memory he could write down. So when the cards were read, there were only five, and in our discussion of them it was fairly clear who had written each memory. This exercise did not initially result in the open acknowledgement of shame in men's lives as I had hoped. It perhaps would have been more effective in a later session and without the expectation of anonymity. Later in this same session, however, as we returned to the story of "The Frog Princess," the men brought up experiences of shame they remembered in relation to the story's portrayal of that which we find ugly in our lives. So perhaps the exercise prompted a sort of remembering within the context of the story.

in this exercise. I suggested that knowing that other men have similarly painful memories may help us to keep our own in perspective. After the group had spent a few minutes writing, the cards were collected, redistributed, and read anonymously. Comments were saved until after all the cards had been read aloud.

Discussion: Shame in Men's Lives

The story of the Frog Princess was discussed in view of the mood of shame in it. The shame is represented in the way Ivan felt about the imperfections clearly visible in his frog wife. In reality she was wonderfully competent, beautiful, and alive--a reality he slowly began to see and cherish--but Ivan was in too much of a hurry to destroy her frog skin (the outer imperfections), so that in the end her complete transformation became impossible. Shame sometimes responds like this when we seek to destroy it or bury it prematurely. We deny what is ugly in our lives to protect ourselves from having to claim it.

Men in the group spoke of how shame was a part of their lives. They referred to what they had written in the exercise "Top Secret," and to other experiences with shame, generally having to do with relationships with family or friends. I spoke of how the experience of having an absent father while growing up produces shame, because it communicates that a boy is not adequate to claim his father's attention. Having an abusive father also produces

shame, because it communicates with force the intensity of a father's anger toward his son, usually stemming from his own sense of inadequacy as a man and a father.

Closing of Session

I commended the group for their willingness to identify experiences of shame and talk about them. I stated that I recognized the courage involved in doing so, because the feeling of shame can reemerge in talking about it. I invited their comments about this evening's session and how they felt about it. Several members spoke of the story's power and of how it helped them to see the power of shame in their lives. We closed by acknowledging that this is not the end of the story, nor the end of shame in our lives, but that it may represent a new way of seeing ourselves and of handling the wounds of shame differently.

Session 3: Descending into the Ashes

Guided Meditation

I led the group in this meditation based on a dream I had in which I ventured underground into a dark cavern which then opened up into a small village. There I saw the back of a man I thought I recognized. When he turned his head I knew it was my father. Then he walked inside without a word. The full meditation can be found in Appendix B.

Reflection/Debriefing

The men were asked: What was this experience like for

you? How did you feel as you proceeded through it? What did you decide to do at the end? How did you feel toward your father? The men spoke of either going after their father and asking him why he turned away or themselves turning away. The experiences of men with their own fathers came into clearer focus through this discussion.

Audiotape Portion: "Road of Ashes"³⁸

We listened to Robert Bly speak of reading fairy tales like Cinderella, and thinking that she is unfortunate to have to clean out the ashes, when in fact she is the lucky third girl. She is not in a position of having to please her parents as are her older sisters. The men were asked: what dreams of yours have turned to ashes?

I conveyed my belief that boys in our culture are taught not to acknowledge their pain. Of course, as boys grow and become men they do feel pain, but naming the pain is an entirely different matter. Taking Bly's lead, I spoke briefly of the need to fully enter one's pain by going down in a descent, sitting among the ashes, and being in the pain fully. I acknowledged that this is not something most men want to do because we've learned to believe that pain is only negative. We fail to see the healing, transformative potential in the pain that is already within us.

³⁸ Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade, Men and the Life of Desire, audiocassette (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Oral Tradition Archives, 1991), Tape 2, Side A.

Story: "The Drovers"³⁹

We listened to a telling of the old Mexican story "The Drovers" by Clarissa Pinkole Estes, Ph.D., about a group of men on a cattle drive to Ojo Caliente. They decide to stop and sleep under a tree, get tangled up, and a shepherd rescues them by helping them to recognize their pain. In this recognition they discover themselves and what belongs to them. A transcript of this short story, as it is told on an audiotape by Estes, is found in Appendix C. The point of the story seems to be that men must begin their healing journey in the place where the pain is in their lives. They need to move into it rather than seeking the quickest escape. Wherever it hurts is where a man can begin to discern where to go next in his descent into ashes.

Discussion

I spoke of my belief that many of our popularized cultural and spiritual values resist any kind of descent. Ours is a culture and a spirituality of ascent. We strive to climb the ladder of success in work so that we might gain the prize of a promotion or higher income or recognition in the eyes of our peers. We strive to grow spiritually toward some sort of intimacy with a heavenly

³⁹ From Clarissa Pinkola Estes' original audio, The Boy Who Married an Eagle, (c)1991 C. P. Estes. All rights reserved. All performance rights reserved. (Boulder, Col.: Sounds True Audio, 1991), Side A. Referenced by permission.

Father (which we don't know with our earthly fathers), or to gain the prize of a place of our own in a Kingdom which is not of this world. We are ascending, or at least always striving to ascend. Estes, Bly and others urge men to choose a different direction from always ascending. Descending means looking at what we've lost or where we've failed. It means starting with our pain.

Group members shared their own painful feelings about such life experiences as failed relationships, the loss of employment, difficult working conditions, and the struggle to maintain intimacy in marriage when children are present. There was a willingness even in this beginning stage of the group's development to begin the descent into our pain.

Poem: "The Stump Easily Overlooked in the Washington Forest"⁴⁰

We listened to this poem, read by Bly on the audiocassette Men and the Wild Child, in which he speaks of a stump that is easily overlooked among trees that are reaching upward to the sky. The closing lines are particularly poignant in relation to the need for men to consciously choose descent at certain times in their lives. Bly says, "there is something in life that doesn't know how to climb; it is sure everything around it that could help it to go upward is dead, or unreliable. Whom do I know

⁴⁰ Robert Bly and James Hillman, Men and the Wild Child, audiocassette (Boulder, Col.: Sounds True Recordings, 1990), Side B.

that resembles this unesteemed wood alone in the forest?"
A complete transcript of this poem is found in Appendix C.

Sharing: Losses in Men's Lives

Groups participants were invited to speak of the ashes in their lives, whether these took the form of childhood wounds, unfulfilled dreams and goals, failure of intimacy, or the harmful and unfulfilling ways we sometimes relate to our children. A brief passage was read which spoke of the sense of isolation men feel because of a "loss of connection man to man."⁴¹

Closing of Session

I commended the men in the group for speaking of their pain openly. I suggested that doing so is only possible in an environment of trust. I invited them to make any closing remarks they wished. There were comments about how thinking of descent was new, about the guided meditation's trip into the darkness which was not frightening, and about how the loss of connection between men and their fathers and between men and other men was real.

Session 4: Creating a Mentoring Community

Poem: "My Father, My Self"

I read this poem of mine which speaks of the spiritual connection I feel with my father, and of the underside of him and of myself I am learning to embrace. See Appendix C.

⁴¹ See Meade, "Lamenting the Loss of Male Spirit," 80.

Story: "The Dark Man's Sooty Brother"⁴²

I read this story about a discharged soldier who met a dark man while walking in the woods. He went to work in the dark man's kitchen underground keeping the pots boiling. He soon discovers that a part of him which is inwardly harsh and critical needs to be boiled away if he is ever to claim his own authority. At first the line taught him by the dark man makes no sense to the soldier as he enters the world again: "I am the Dark Man's Sooty Brother and my King as well." But he eventually discards his naive ways and learns to ask for what he wants. He has been awakened to his deeper, more authentic self. See Appendix C.

Reflection: Meaning of the Story

It is significant that the man agrees to go underground. Although it doesn't seem like a very attractive alternative to him, he is at a loss as to what to do with himself. The job of keeping the pots boiling is an active process. The man says to those he discovers inside the pots, "Once I was in your power; now you are in my power." Bly says of this:

What is that like in daily life? I would say to get a hold on the main lines of your father's life would be a boiling. To see which people

⁴² Robert Bly, "The Dark Man's Sooty Brother: Male Naivete and the Loss of the Kingdom," in Psyche's Stories: Modern Jungian Interpretations of Fairy Tales, eds. Murray Stein and Lionel Corbett, vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill.: Chiron Publications, 1991), 91-101.

shamed you in your childhood and how they did it, and who in this place continues to shame you would be a boiling. Power works on us namelessly when we are children, and as adults our job is to name it.⁴³

The following questions were posed to members of the group: Who sits in your pots? What images of authority in your lives have been especially critical or caused you the most pain? Bly writes: "Usually we sit hunched up beneath these critics, inert, resigned, stuck; so it is a great advance just to get them off our backs, into a pot, sitting in hot water."⁴⁴ The man displays his naivete by passively allowing the Innkeeper to steal his gold while he is asleep. So naivete and passivity relate to a kind of sleep. In naivete, one is asleep to the greed, ill motives, and shadow side of oneself and of others. In passivity, one is asleep to the daytime activities of alertness and expressiveness.

The shavings the man receives upon completion of his time underground turn to gold as he reenters the world above. This suggests that what a man learns about himself in the descent leads to a more meaningful life. These are hard lessons learned in the midst of his pain. When the gold is stolen by the innkeeper, it's as if the man's new insights about himself have been stolen. The old patterns of naivete and passivity return. All the work has

⁴³ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

apparently been for nothing.

The Dark Man instructs the man to introduce himself "I am the Dark Man's sooty brother and my King as well." Bly says this line suggests "that the process of boiling has freed the man from some reliance on outer authority or outer kingship, so that he is, to some extent, his own King."⁴⁵ He now has an inner authority of his own. Later, when he descends a second time, the man evidences this kingship in his ability to tell the Dark Man what he wants.

Closing of Session

I commended the men for their willingness to place themselves in the story and ask themselves about who was in their boiling pots, about the need for inner authority, and about the changes they sought in their lives. I invited them to make any closing comments about this evening's session.

Session 5: Finding Our Fathers

Check-in

Each person was invited to take 4-5 minutes to say how they felt coming into the session.

Poem: "Thinking About My Father"⁴⁶

I read this poem in which the author, David Huddle, remembers the difficulty of seeing his father die in the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁶ David Huddle, "Thinking About My Father," in A Good Man: Fathers and Sons in Poetry and Prose, ed. Irv Broughton (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 38-40.

hospital and recalls viewing an old home movie of him being handed by his mother to a thin young man on the front porch. Appendix C contains the complete poem, the closing lines of which are especially poignant.

Some days
I wake up limp and happy
as that child, smiled at
and lifted up to the sun
by someone who wanted me
right here in this world.

Story: Untitled

I read Richard Lapchick's account of growing up with a father who was a professional athlete.⁴⁷ In it he describes the wonderful gift his father gave him. See Appendix C. This story was intended to evoke men's own internal images of their fathers which were affirming.

Written Exercise: "Treasure Game"⁴⁸

Men were asked to write on index cards a gift they received from their fathers, and these were shared in the group. I suggested that a part of healing the wounds of our fathers is seeing the positive dimensions of what they sought to do for us in the social and cultural context in which we were being raised.

Closing of Session

I commended the men for their active participation in

⁴⁷ Richard E. Lapchick, untitled story, in Sons on Fathers: A Book of Men's Writing, ed. Ralph Keyes (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 32-33.

⁴⁸ The use of this exercise is described by Osherson in Wrestling with Love, pages 65 and 315.

this session and remembered in summary form some of the gifts they mentioned having received from their fathers. I thanked them for coming and reminded them of the next week's session.

Session 6: Raising Our Children Well

Guided Meditation

See Appendix B.

Story: "The Man Who Did Not Wish to Die"⁴⁹

I read this story to the group in order to highlight the value of raising our children as an expression of the immortality we otherwise seek. See Appendix C for story.

Discussion

The themes of this story were discussed, including:

1. Generativity - "The god tells the man to provide for his children and help his neighbors instead of seeking his own immortality."⁵⁰ The paper crane personifies caring for another person and generativity. To be generative is to have "the power of producing or originating."⁵¹
2. Simple pragmatism - the man is told to work hard, raise his children well, and honor his neighbors, all of

⁴⁹ Allen B. Chinen, Once Upon a Midlife: Classic Stories and Mythic Tales to Illuminate the Middle Years (New York: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1992), 97-107.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 101.

⁵¹ "Generative," Webster's New World Dictionary.

which affirms ordinary, everyday life.⁵²

In relation to this story I stated that for men, confronting our mortality begins in midlife, and is humbling. Members of the group talked about their own simple pleasure at being with their children.

The following questions were addressed to the group for further reflection on the story. As men, how do we express our caring, our generativity in relation to our children? If what we seek is to be instrumental in their growth and development as individuals, how do we go about it? What are the tools at our disposal?

Poem: "Late Afternoon Walk"

The session was closed as I read this prose poem I had written about a walk with my son. See Appendix C.

Closing of Session

I thanked the men for their personal sharing and invited them to close with an insight, a learning, or a feeling, they had gained as a result of this session.

Subsequent Sessions

The group continued to meet on a monthly basis following the initial six weekly sessions, and as of this writing is still meeting. In later sessions I introduced the use of the talking stick, a ritual object borrowed from the Native American tradition, which "represents respecting

⁵² Chinen, Once Upon a Midlife, 102.

a man speaking from his heart."⁵³ I explained that while a man holds the talking stick, all listen to him without comment or interruption. The group used the talking stick at the beginning of each subsequent session as a means of entering into the ritualized space we were creating in which to speak from our hearts. After everyone had an opportunity to speak, the talking stick was placed in the center of the circle, where it could be picked up later by a man when he wished to speak, to be sure he would be heard.

I also introduced a song, called "Shalom to You,"⁵⁴ which I suggested we use at the close of our sessions. The words reflect the care for one another we were developing, and served as a benediction we could offer one another until we met again.

Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies bless you, my friends.
In all your living and through your loving,
Christ be your shalom, Christ be your shalom.

⁵³ Bill Kauth, "Ritual in Men's Groups," in Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement, ed. Christopher Harding (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 204-205.

⁵⁴ Elise S. Eslinger, "Shalom to You," in The United Methodist Hymnal, harmony by Carlton R. Young from a Traditional Spanish melody (New York: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), no. 666. Words reprinted by permission.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Evaluation of Group Experience

In this section I wish to evaluate the experience of the father's group from the perspectives of the participants, and of myself as both participant and facilitator. The evaluations are drawn from written and verbal statements of the six participants. I am concerned with five broad categories of evaluation in measuring the quality of the group's time together and the degree to which we benefitted individually and collectively. Names are not used so as to protect the confidentiality of the group members.

The first category coincides with the initial stage of group development. It is concerned with the development of a sense of community, the building of trust, and the creating of an environment in which men are able to let down their guards and be genuinely themselves in the present moment. In our group this included the acknowledgement that often as men we tend to interact with others on the basis of competitiveness. This tendency is a part of the culturally sanctioned work ethic by which men define themselves by what they do and their level of achievement and/or outward success, especially in comparison with others. Relationship, community, and mutuality are all dimensions of living which must be

intentionally nurtured in men's lives, often against the flow of culturally defined norms of male gender roles.

The second category is akin to the first. It is concerned with the level of participation in each member of the group, both from their own vantage point and that of others. What is the quality of the interaction between men in the group? How open are participants in sharing their own life experiences, joys and struggles? Is there a depth to the sharing that takes place? Are members emotionally honest in the telling of their stories? To what extent are members willing and able to risk being vulnerable with one another? Because we were in the beginning stage in the development of our group, these are more questions calling us forward to a different way of relating with one another than an achievable goal within the first six sessions.

Thirdly, I am interested in how group members viewed the role of facilitator and more specifically how my facilitation either assisted them or not in meeting their needs. This is a difficult dimension to understand. I am operating out of theoretical and practical understandings of what I am doing of which they may not be aware. My expectations and wishes for the group experience are different than those of other members, just as no doubt each of theirs are different from one another's. We did not establish individual contracts when we formed our group, and as a result the expectations of the men in the

group remained largely unspoken. In the future, I expect I will establish contracts with group participants through which we can evaluate the group process together. Nonetheless, the evaluations of this group's members of the overall tone of our meetings reflects the tone I sought to engender.

The fourth category for evaluation, on the practical side, seeks to measure the effectiveness of various means I employed in opening up conversation and calling forth our imaginations. These include the use of fairy tales, real-life stories, poetry, meditations, and written and verbal exercises. The use of these resources emerges from my belief that our imaginations need to be cultivated and honored in order for us to then imagine other ways of being men and fathers. There is a direct, even if mysterious, link between how we imagine and how we see ourselves in relation to others.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I wanted to assess whether there were learnings as a result of our sharing. I assumed that there would be some learnings we all had in common--such as the realization that each of us has struggles in knowing how to be a father--and that some learnings would be more individualized, based on current circumstances in each man's life. Much depends on the models of parenting we have inherited, on the choices we have made in terms of work and leisure time, and our

openness in exploring and healing our own unique forms of woundedness.

Participants' Evaluation and Reflection

Participants rated the sense of community moderately high on the scale I provided for them. The responses correlated with individual's expectations in part, I believe. The two members who rated this category highest seemed to also have lower expectations about the level of sharing needed to build such community and thus they experienced the group as having more community than they had experienced before in other settings. These same two men tended to rate all categories higher and with less differentiation of scores than the others. One of them wrote, "My expectations were of a group that would discuss parenting from a father's perspective. We went beyond that in ways that brought us full circle. Expectations were matched or exceeded." Two other members suggested that we consider doing something together in a social context, a sign perhaps that men still find it easier to build relationships through activity than through conversation and deep sharing. Another man said, "The group was a refreshing change of pace," although he wished that there had been at least one Latino participant to give the group "a cultural-diversity dimension that was lacking." Another man wished there had been 8-10 members rather than six.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 being

high, group members rated the quality of the following dimensions as indicated below:

Interaction of group members

(3,3,4,4,5,5; avg.=4)

Depth of sharing

(2,3,3,4,4,5; avg.=3.3)

Emotional honesty of participants

(3,3,4,4,5,5; avg.=4)

In terms of the second evaluative category then, the men in the group rated the level of participation as moderately high, with depth of sharing scoring the lowest average. One man wrote, "I expected a little more openness, 'out-there-ness.'" He attributed the degree of openness as being reflective in part of the cultural differences he observed between locals and outsiders, that is, between the two men who were born and raised in "the valley" and the rest of us who had been there a relatively short time.

A case in point is the man, who had been there the shortest time of any, who wrote, "The valley is too small and interwoven for me to feel free to show much vulnerability." In contrast, one of the locals evaluated his own openness and participation in this manner: "I was able to open up in this group in ways I never did before...still a ways to go, but improving." Another member observed, "I feel I have been open and honest--perhaps the more we get to know each other, I can open up

further." If others have hope for greater openness and deeper sharing, then perhaps the relational connections will grow in time.

An evaluation of my facilitation of the group is harder to come by. The average score on the rating scale for "Leadership of group facilitator" was 4.3, moderately high to high. It was my goal to be both facilitator and active participant. This created a bit of an internal conflict around wanting to provide individual counseling attention at certain times and wanting also to require greater responsibility for the group process, which sometimes meant being quiet and allowing the group to find its own way. It was a conflict between providing structure to the group and being non-directive.

The participants seemed to like the structure, usually involving a check-in time, a brief meditation, a story, group sharing, and some sort of summary or concluding thoughts. The extent, however, to which this very structure either inhibited or enhanced the degree of participation and the depth of sharing is not entirely clear. As a result of this struggle within me for a workable model of facilitation, I became less structured over time, and eventually found a balance between structure and responsiveness to the issues presented by members of the group. Still, the basic outline of each session remained relatively consistent from week to week. One

possibility for the future of this or other groups is sharing the responsibility for planning and leading the sessions, as suggested by one of the participants.

Of the methods I employed, by far the stories and meditations were most appreciated. Each was rated consistently at 4 or 5 on the scale by every member. In addition, one man wrote, "I have come to appreciate the richness of the myths/stories, and the teaching they provide." Another said, "I liked the stories and found them very helpful/illuminating."

Finally, what I was most intent upon was that this be a learning experience, allowing each of us to learn something about our feelings, our experiences of woundedness, our current choices, our relationships, and ourselves. It was my hope that the combined resources of individual men, the group process, stories, poetry and meditations would create the needed environment in which personal and spiritual growth would occur. One man remarked, "I now pay more attention to what I do with the kids. Before, I acted instinctively and did what I thought came naturally or from my upbringing." He clearly was being more intentional in his fathering as a result of participating in the group.

Another man, who is not yet a father, said that he "found it helpful to begin thinking about issues which have seemed distant to me--helpful to be reminded/warned of the

need to be intentional about such things." Another man, also not yet a father, claimed to "have come to appreciate the gifts my father has given me," and hopes to "give to my children what he has given me." One member stated, "I am glad some of us are struggling with the same issues--marginal parenting, the need to have more time with the kids, fear of missing out." Another echoed this concern by recognizing that "others have the same or similar experiences with their families."

One man found the group experience helpful "in clarifying some of the personal issues I'm confronting as I enter into a different phase of my life--'middle age,' parenting, long-haul marriage, demanding career, etc." Summarizing our responsibility as fathers to our children, one member, who is separated from his wife and is the primary caregiver for their two young sons, has had his belief in what he calls "the four T's" reinforced. These are "Take Time To Teach," by which he means a patient modeling of a level of confidence and competence that allows them to explore what they want to be and do in the world. Time and our ability to teach our children are perhaps our most precious commodities as fathers.

Observation of Group Process

in Pastoral Perspective

I initiated the father's group with nervous anticipation and conducted the first meeting with fear and

trepidation. I feared it might be just another failed attempt of men to connect with one another. My own sense of disconnection with my father and other men over the years created this deep anxiety within me as I prepared to be with these men. The group has been anything but a failure. Each member of the group has engaged himself in the sessions to the extent he presently feels comfortable, and each one has stated that the group time has offered him some opportunity for self-exploration and growth.

The purpose of the group is to stir men's imaginations and feelings and spiritual yearnings about fathering in a way that frees them to consider what sort of father they wish to be. They may need to set new priorities for the time they have available to be with their children. They may need to look at the wounds they have carried with them as men which have stilted their abilities to relate empathically with their children. They may need to confess their own inadequacies and failures as a father or husband. The group time has been filled with such thoughtful and heartfelt considerations.

It is more difficult to overcome the competitiveness which shows itself in very subtle, almost imperceptible ways. In the perhaps unconscious desire to present oneself in a positive light, men will justify their busyness as simply a means of providing for their families, ignoring the power they have to make decisions and keep promises.

And yet the deep emotional struggle within men to be adequate fathers has presented itself in honest ways too. This struggle is a source of real pain to them, even grief.

The group members have been highly respectful in their willingness to listen to others' stories. The listening they have done has been a source of validation and healing for the woundedness men have discussed around marital relationships, being fathers, and work situations. A question I have asked myself in relation to this group as it continues to meet is, will the group be able to overcome the differences in expectation about the nature of the group? I believe such differences are a matter to be discussed openly, and will help the group to do this in an effort to create greater understanding and mutuality.

Pastoral Implications and Proposals

Many men are not only hurting because of the difficulty they have in establishing and maintaining relationships marked by mutuality and empathy in our culture, but are also deeply yearning for something more. Distorted images of masculinity, poor relational models, feelings of self-worth defined by one's level of productivity in the marketplace, and men's emotional wounds all contribute to the "yearning for closer, more fulfilling, more life-giving connectedness with others,

with our world, and with ourselves."¹

From a pastoral perspective, and with an incarnational faith, it is also true that in yearning "for life-giving relationships with any person or part of creation, we are at the very same time reaching for God."² Thus men's spirituality needs to become more deeply rooted in mutual relationships that honor and respect who men are in all of their vulnerability and woundedness as well as who they are becoming as they seek to live redemptively in community with others.

Beverly Wildung Harrison speaks of the need for those of us who are Jesus' followers to recover the radical nature of "Jesus' active embodiment of love" expressed in and through "his power of mutuality."³ She writes:

Like Jesus, we are called to a radical activity of love, to a way of being in the world that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life. Like Jesus, we must live out this calling in a place and time where the distortions of loveless power stand in conflict with the power of love. We are called to confront, as Jesus did, that which thwarts the power of human personal and communal becoming, that which twists relationship, which denies human well-being, community, and human solidarity to so many in our world.⁴

The mutuality Harrison addresses represents a "move toward

¹ Nelson, 13.

² Ibid., 14.

³ Harrison, 222.

⁴ Ibid., 223.

a recovery of a New Testament ethos of faith,"⁵ a move which helps to confront the distorted images of power in our lives and in our understandings of the biblical witness to God's activity in the world.

The need for men's groups and father's groups has perhaps never been greater. We are in a time of changing definitions and roles related to parenting and family. Men need to explore new definitions for their masculinity as these relate to being a father in today's world. Husbands and wives who are seeking to be partners in the task of parenting need support and encouragement to work on their relationships, which serve as models for their children of the nature and dynamics of woman-man interaction. It is important that the model provided be one of mutual respect and empowerment.

For this reason, getting women and men together for a workshop on creating healthy connection in relationships is something of great potential value.⁶ The Stone Center relational model of human development may be helpfully utilized in order for participants to consider a paradigm shift in their understanding of the woman-man relationship. Items to be presented include self-in-relation concepts of connections, disconnections and violations, especially as

⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁶ See Stephen J. Bergman and Janet Surrey, The Woman-Man Relationship: Impasses and Possibilities, Work in Progress, no. 55 (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1992).

these affect women's experience in this culture, in that they assume greater responsibility generally for the care and maintenance of relationships. The concept of "male relational dread"--a man's sense of inadequacy in relationship leading him to withdraw or attack--is also presented. Part of the workshop entails women and men going to separate rooms to answer questions on a prepared form. In smaller groups of three or four, they respond to three questions:

- 1) Name three strengths the other gender group brings to relationship.
- 2) What do you most want to understand about the other gender group?
- 3) What do you most want the other gender group to understand about you?⁷

This small group discussion gets shared in the larger group and forms the basis for an extended discussion about the ways men and women get to mutuality in their relationships with one another. Communication becomes the key for greater understanding of the nature of relationships and their role in healthy psychological development, and I would add, spiritual development as human beings.

One implication calling for further attention in the Christian community is the often shame-based relational context of the congregation and its effects upon children. This is seen in how the congregational emotional system of relationships can simply perpetuate the patterns of

⁷ Ibid., 3.

families who comprise it. The nature of shame and of guilt need to be distinguished from one another. Shame is the internal sense of being exposed for one's own inadequacy. There is little one can do about shame because it is felt in one's very identity. Guilt, on the other hand, is the result of what one has done to cause injury to another. One can potentially set things right again in the case of guilt by seeking forgiveness and making amends. Preaching and teaching toward greater awareness of the destructiveness of shame in the lives of children are needed. The church is to be healing the wounds of shame, not contributing to them.

In addition, working with parents together on developing mutually empathic and enriching relationships in marriages and families is something the religious community, specifically the church, can organize and resource. Values of mutuality and empathy can be fostered through parent education and the intentionally created learning environments in the church school, nursery, day care and preschool programs. Marriage and family enrichment and counseling are needed for persons and families in the community, utilizing insights from the self-in-relation model to strengthen the ability and resolve of persons to practice structuring their relationships in ways that are mutual and empathic.

Especially in domestic violence situations, where

violence results from disconnections in relationships, working with men who abuse members of their families is a need crying for attention. Religion has been responsible for sanctioning and maintaining patriarchal patterns of power which have proved to be destructive. Therefore, the religious community needs to draw upon the theological and spiritual resources which recognize and cultivate the interrelatedness of all life in order to replace destructive patterns with mutually empowering ones. Men in these domestic violence cycles need psychological help in learning to control their anger and aggressiveness, and to express it appropriately within a safe context. Perhaps a relational approach in conjunction with some form of behavioral therapy is needed in these cases.

The capacity for empathy in boys will be realized when significant persons, either a parent or extended family member, makes the effort to be in relationship with them and demonstrate that they value their feelings and thoughts by means of authentic listening and respectful responding, what Nelle Morton calls "hearing into speech."⁸ Fathers are especially important in modeling relationships of mutuality and empathy with their spouses and children. Jay McDaniel speaks of an ecological spirituality which affirms "that the presence of God in our lives is an empowering

⁸ See Nelle Morton, The Journey Is Home (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) cited in McDaniel, 171.

presence, one that hears us into speech and that empowers us to hear others into speech."⁹ This divine empathy offers hope to "wounded healers" that our labor is not in vain, that our involvement in nurturing mutually empathic relationships for ourselves and others will bear fruit.

⁹ McDaniel, 172.

APPENDIX A

Promotional Flyer

Someone knocks on the door,
 we do not have time to dress.
 He wants us to come with him
 through the blowing and rainy streets,
 to the dark house.
 We will go there, the body says, and there
 find the father whom we have never met....

--Robert Bly

**A GROUP FOR MEN WHO ARE FATHERS**

This group is designed for men who are, or expect to be, fathers. As a group we will explore some of the interrelated issues men face today--such as intimacy, gender roles, sexuality, spirituality, the need for mentors, and our relationships to our own fathers.

Particular attention will be paid to the wounded father within men which so often is concealed behind a tough exterior, emotional numbness, addictions, a sense of shame, a lack of self-care, or wishing for something more in life and not knowing what.

We will explore our hopes and fears related to being men and fathers in today's world. How can we be good enough fathers amid competing demands and expectations?

Stories, myths, poems, and music will be utilized in evoking the deep feelings within our own personal stories.

Mark Richardson, father of two children and pastor of the Holtville United Methodist Church, will be facilitating the group. He is currently completing the Doctor of Ministry degree in pastoral counseling and theology at the School of Theology at Claremont, California.

When: Wednesday evenings, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
 Six weeks beginning October 13, 1993

Where: First United Methodist Church, Lounge
 8th & Olive, El Centro

Please call Mark at 356-XXXX. An interview will be necessary to see if this group will best meet your needs.

APPENDIX B

Guided Meditations

Guided Meditation for Session 2

Get comfortable in your chair and close your eyes.

In these moments of quiet, feel your body against your chair. If there is tension or anxiety in your shoulders, your back, your neck, or anywhere else in your body, let the tenseness drop off and fall to the ground. Feel your muscles relax. Let your arms and shoulders loosen and become free of any tension that you have brought with you after a hard day of work. Feel your breathing, moving in and out of your chest, slowly. Now take a deep breath in and release it. As you breath in and out again, release the worries you have brought with you.

Now, as you breath in again, imagine a divine, creative presence here in the room. You are here in the presence of the Spirit. With every breath you are breathing in the Spirit of life and of healing and of wholeness. Breath in this healing presence.

If it is true that God breathed the breath of life into the first human beings and into us at our birth, then God is still able to breath in us as we are being recreated with each breath. Allow the possibility of that thought to sink into your being and change you if you dare. Bring your whole self into this room now--body, mind, soul, and spirit--and be fully present in this company.

Guided Meditation for Session 3

Get into a comfortable position, preferably with both feet on the floor, and your arms resting comfortably on your lap. Close your eyes and relax. Let the tensions and worries of the day drop away. Welcome the quiet of this moment into your body.

Breathe deeply. Breathe in the silence. Breathe out the concerns of the day. Breathe in the Spirit of life and aliveness. Breathe out the anxiety you are carrying in your muscles and in your bones and in your mind. Breathe deeply, and feel the rhythms of your breaths, in and out, as soothing waves of spiritual refreshment.

(Silence for 20-30 seconds)

Tonight we are going to journey downward, inward. You will need to go down into your inner self. You will need to imagine with your inner eye and experience with your emotional being.

This meditation is based on a dream I had several months ago, which was a powerful reminder to me of what I am working on during this stage in my life. I invite you to take this journey now, following your inner eye, and see where it might take you. We are not in control of many experiences in our lives, whether in our waking or our sleeping. So, as much as possible, you will need to trust the movement of this dreamlike encounter to take you where you need to go and to help you see and hear what it is that

you need to see and hear tonight.

(Brief pause)

You are in a long, paneled room lined with shelves of old books, comfortable chairs and a fireplace--a room in which you have never been, but which nonetheless feels warm and inviting. There is a fire in the fireplace, and the smell of burning wood scents the room. Ashes spread out from the fireplace where the drafts of wind have been. You reach your hands down, touching the ashes, feeling the smoothness of their texture. You are waiting for someone. You can hear people talking, and out the window you see people sitting on the sunlit lawn, children running and playing, and older people sitting on park benches. You take it all in, enjoying each moment. Time seems to stand still. The whole scene makes you feel deeply alive and connected with humanity, although you do not personally know the people you are seeing.

(Brief pause)

After a time, you discover a hole in one wall. As you approach the hole you see that it opens into a cavern, poorly lit, with broad steps which seem to descend into the earth. You are unsure about what to do. You stand there, looking into the hole, wondering where it goes, and again you hear some voices, this time coming from within the cavern. They are calm voices, no doubt of persons exploring this underground place for themselves. You

decide to take a step through the hole, then another, and another, down wide shelf-like steps, until you are well into a spacious and dark cavern. There are only occasional torches on the side walls to illuminate this shadowy world. You are fascinated, not fearful. You feel as though you belong here, at least in this moment. You see traces of light coming from below.

As you take more steps and descend further into the cavernous space, the light draws you toward another opening, through which you enter a small village with houses and trees and small shops. The roads appear to be covered with ashes which rise like a cloud with each step you take. You proceed, walking slowly through the center of the village, not recognizing anyone or anything, until there to your right you see the back of a man you believe you recognize. You stand there looking at the back of this man, and when he turns slightly, you see the profile of his face, and know beyond any doubt that this man is your father. He catches a glimpse of you, and then goes inside. It seems he doesn't want to see you.

You must now decide what you will do. (Pause)

When you are ready, you may open your eyes.

Guided Meditation for Session 6

(Silence)

Begin in the silence, in the quiet, to arrive here in the room after what has probably been a full day of activity. As you breathe in and out be mindful of your body. As men we are often oblivious to our bodies. We allow our bodies to carry us through the day from one activity to another without being very aware of them. Unless we become sick, or we inadvertently hurt some part of our body, or we become tired, we take our bodies for granted. For the next few moments let us focus our attention on our physical presence in this room sitting in this chair.

Breathe in and out, long and deep breaths.

The Spirit of Life creates movements in our lives, and when we are in tune with this life-giving, renewing Spirit, there is a rhythm to our breathing as well as in our living. Imagine as you breath in that you are breathing in a sense of peace, inner peace, peace of mind, peace of soul. Imagine this peace pervading your inner self, cleansing you of troubling thoughts and harsh emotions, for the present moments at least.

(Silence)

Now see this inner peace brought into the world through your interactions and relationships with others. Breath out this peace in a way that extends its influence

across barriers, across differences, reconciling you with others in the world.

(Silence)

Imagine now as you breath in deeply that you are moving into the interior world, the world inside you, with its unexplored territory, with its hidden places, with its vivid dreams. You are here to gain an appreciation for the depth and richness of this interior place where you are most truly yourself.

(Silence)

As you breath out you are moving to the world of others. You are bringing the rich texture of your inner experience into a vision of a better world for you and your children and all the world's people.

(Silence)

Finally, imagine as you breath in and out, aligning your being in these moments with the rhythms of time and seasons, that you are breathing in the experience of solitude, of being alone. Go off to a place, wherever it might be, in which it is easiest to find such solitude, where you can find rest for your soul, refreshment and renewal. Imagine that you are alone even now, with no one and nothing around you.

(Silence)

Now, having been in solitude and having found renewal in the silent alone moments, imagine the ease with which

you may now come into community with others. As you breath out you are entering into relationship with fellow travelers. May the life-giving Spirit enable us during the next hour and a half to enter into the community we are creating and give us the courage we need to face sometimes painful issues and struggles in our lives.

Appendix C

Fairy Tales, Stories, and Poems

The following fairy tales, stories, and poems were used in sessions of the father's group to initiate or illustrate particular themes and elicit men's feelings, thoughts, attitudes, concerns, and imaginative capacities in addressing those themes.

Session 2: Recognizing the Father Wound

Fairy Tale: "The Frog Princess"¹

Once upon a time there was a merchant in Russia who had three sons. And this merchant was sort of the bossy father type, and he decided he'd help the boys find a bride. So he told them, "I'm going to help you find your bride. I have an idea. I'm going to give each of you a bow and an arrow, and you shoot the arrow, and whoever it hits, that's who your bride will be.

So the older son took his arrow, and his bow, and he strung it and he shot it and it hit the edge of the house of a very rich merchant. And so the daughter came out, and the father said, "Well, would you like to marry my son," and the daughter said yes. So, they're doing pretty well. Rich merchant's daughter.

The second son strung his bow and shot it and it hit the side of a prince's house. Umh, not bad. The daughter comes out. "Would you like to marry my son?" "Yes." So that's settled.

Now the third son comes along. He's more like us.

¹ Transcribed from Robert Bly, reading of "The Frog Princess," interview with Michael Toms, from The Power of Shame, audiocassette (Boulder, Col: Sounds True Recordings, 1991), Side A. Used by permission. This transcription is taken from the original "New Dimensions" radio interview program #2140, broadcast nationally on public radio stations. If you would like a cassette tape of the complete interview, send \$9.95 plus \$2.00 P&H (add sales tax in CA) to: New Dimensions Tapes, P.O. Box 410510, San Francisco, CA 94141-0510, or call (415) 563-8899. A complimentary journal is also available.

And he isn't very strong, and he tries to string the bow, and he shoots the arrow, and it flies into a swamp. A frog comes up, carrying the arrow in her mouth. The father said, "Well, that's it. That's the bride then. Now all of my three sons have brides. We'll have the wedding in about two weeks."

Well, Ivan was the third son. How do you think he felt? Umh, he wept, didn't he? And he says one of the most famous lines in all of Russian literature. . . . He said, "You know, this is going to be my bride. . . . Marriage is a serious thing. It's not just a walk through an open field." But what can you do? It's all set up. So the wedding is held.

Well, the first bride came down the aisle with her husband, and the second bride with her husband, and Ivan's bride was carried on a little silver plate down the aisle. And that's the way that was. Well, you know he wept all night before the wedding. Wouldn't you? And then, so that part of the story is over now. Can you feel that?

Well, then the father said, "You know, what I'd like to do is find out which is the best of my daughter's-in-law. So I have a plan. I want to see which one can make the best shirt. Who can make a beautiful shirt?"

Well, the two older brothers, they always knew what the younger brother was like, and what a schmuck he was, so they don't even bother to make a shirt. One of them takes an old gunny sack and makes it into a shirt, and the other one takes an old bowling shirt or something and makes it...and the youngest one goes home and he cries again. Hmm?

But that night, that night his frog bride slips out of her skin, 'cause she can do that. And she leaves the skin on the bed, and she slips away, and she goes down the street, and she says, "Nurses, nurses, nurses! Make me a beautiful shirt, the kind that your father wore on his name day." And the nurses do that. They make one of these incredibly beautiful embroidered shirts with birds and everything on it. You know what it would look like--a Romanian wedding dress, wedding shirt. Then she slips back into her frog skin again. And when Ivan wakes up in the morning there the shirt is folded on the bed.

So they all go to the king, and the king says, "Fantastic, this is a beautiful shirt. Now, this shirt, it's nothing--this old bowling shirt. It's stupid. It looks like you're the best."

And the two brothers said, "Two out of three! Two out of three! Two out of three!" So he says, "Alright, alright, alright! Let's see who can make the best loaf."

Well, so, the two other brides say, "You know, there's something wierd about this. I don't know if this one's really a frog or not. We'd better watch her." So they go over to her house and they watch how's she's going to make the bread.

She takes a big ax and knocks in the top of their oven, you know, those big ovens that people always slept on in the wintertime. Shes knocks in the top of it, and then she dumps the dough in. And the other sisters thought, "Wow, that's how to do it." They go home and break their ovens, and put the dough in. Meanwhile, the frog woman fixes the oven up again, plasters it, puts in the stuff, and has a good container, and good warmth, and that's the way that is.

So, when they have this meeting, it's the same sort of thing. And the two sisters bring their loaves, which are flat and lumpy and horrible. And the father says, "Oh, God, I mean, you can't even give this to working people. But look at this beautiful loaf that she's made, oh, fantastic."

Well, how do you think the older sisters feel now? Unh, unh, unh, unh. "So, there's one more thing," he said, "I'd like to see, which one of you can be the best dancer. We're going to have a ball and see which one can dance the best."

How do you think Ivan felt? Now he's got to go to the ball. It's one thing having a frog wife and being able to keep her home, so no one sees her. It's another thing to have a frog wife and go to a ball and dance, isn't it?

So now a strange thing happens, because before the ball, when Ivan's been crying again, she says to him, "You know, I can slip out of my frog skin, and I'm going to do that tonight. So, you go ahead to the ball and I'll come a little later." He says, "Okay." He goes to the ball.

A little later this incredibly beautiful woman comes in--unbelievably beautiful--everyone is stunned, the king looks. She walks over to Ivan, takes his hands, and they dance and everyone is amazed, absolutely amazed.

Then the king said, "We're going to have the dancing contest, but I think we'll have the dinner first." So they have the dinner. I must tell you that when the new

princess has finished her chicken, she tucks a few of them into her sleeve. And the other sisters watch, and they stick their chicken bones into their sleeve. And then after the new princess is finished with her wine, she pours a little bit of wine into her other sleeve. And the sisters watch carefully, and they take and pour some wine into their sleeve.

Then it's time for the dance, and so the two sisters dance first, and it's okay. And then the third sister, the new one, stands up, and when she waves her left hand pine trees and mountains appear in the room, and when she waves her right hand then birds begin to sing on all of those pine trees, and clouds come. It was gorgeous, wasn't it? And when she waves both hands it all stops, and she sits down. Well, the older sisters are amazed, and they stand up, and one of them waves her left hand and chicken bones fly into the father's face, and the other waves her right hand and wine flies into the father's face. And he says, "Enough, enough, enough! Finito! Finito! Finito!"

So that's the way that went, and Ivan was proud, wasn't he? We're coming to the end of this part of the story, are you ready? So, they have a marvelous time dancing and Ivan is so proud of her. Then he says to her, "I'll go home first, and you just stay a little while." And she says, "Alright, I'll come soon." And Ivan goes home, and he finds the frog skin, and he burns it. Umm. She comes home, and she says, "Where's my frog skin?" And he said, "Uh, I burned it." She said, "Why did you do that? Why did you do that? If you'd only waited, I could have been a human being all the time. If you'd only waited another two weeks. Now I have to leave." He said, "Don't leave! Don't leave!" She said, "I have to go. I'm going now. I'm going. I'm gone. I'm gone. I'm going. I'm gone. I'm finished. I'm gone." She goes.

Ivan spends two or three years, maybe four years, maybe ten years after that, wandering around looking for her, 'cause there was something the matter with his timing, wasn't it, or what was the matter?

Session 3: Descending into the Ashes

Story: "The Drovers"²

There's an old Mexican story called "The Drovers," about a group of men who are on a cattle drive to Ojo Caliente. They decide to stop and sleep under a tree. As they do, they all take their shoes off, and they're very tired, and somehow when they awaken, all their legs and all their feet are all tangled up with each other.

And they say, "Well, I don't know what we're going to do, because I don't know how we can finish this cattle drive because I don't know which legs and which feet belong to whom."

Along came a shepherd, who said, "Well, I think I can help." And he picked up a pine needle, and he stuck it into one of the people's big toes, and that person cried, "Ouch!" He said, "Well, that must be your foot." And he took the pine needle and poked it into another person's sole, and that person said, "Ouch, hey, that really hurts!"

And so it went, the shepherd saying, "Well, that must be your foot then. Whatever hurts you, it must be yours, it must belong to you." And the Drovers got to their feet finally, all sorted out, and went on their way.

Poem: "The Stump Easily Overlooked
in the Washington Forest"³

The stump easily overlooked in the Washington Forest is vivid when near, and resembles an elephant's leg with the body shot off. The short walls, their bark loosened here and there by rain, show a wood sleek and silvery. The bare wood is rough to the fingers, uneven as weeks of hospital introspection. Spires stand up on its low tower, resembling broken vows. Ivy has moved in among the spires,

² From Clarissa Pinkola Estes' original audio, The Boy Who Married an Eagle, (c)1991 C. P. Estes. All rights reserved. All performance rights reserved. (Boulder, Col.: Sounds True Audio, 1991), Side A. Referenced by permission.

³ Transcribed from Robert Bly, reading of "The Stump Easily Overlooked in the Washington Forest," from Men and the Wild Child, by Robert Bly and James Hillman, audiocassette (Boulder, Col.: Sounds True Recordings, 1990), Side B. Used by permission of Robert Bly.

and the tower is made gay by a few fallen pine needles.

Above the stump other trees go on growing, expanding into the air. Vines climb trunks toward light. But there is something in life that doesn't know how to climb; it is sure everything around it that could help it to go upward is dead, or unreliable. Whom do I know that resembles this unesteemed wood alone in the forest?

Session 4: Creating a Mentoring Community

Poem: "My Father, My Self"⁴

Years I've struggled to come to terms
 with the image of my father in me.
 Not only the transient qualities or relative values,
 but rather the core of the man:
 One who searches relentlessly for a place of beauty,
 One who yearns stubbornly for a more lasting peace,
 One who seeks compassion in a world which knows far
 too much pain,
 One who wrestles with the unanswerable without fear
 of being seduced by its charm,
 One who hopes for a better day.

Some look at me and volunteer that I look more like my
 father each day.
 Some see his mannerisms or hear something of his voice
 in mine.
 He and I share a place in the middle, too:
 the middle child of three, and
 a son who is father to a son.

More significant than any of this though,
 is my newly acquired awareness of a spiritual
 connection, a sense that perhaps his journey is
 also mine.

No one can be expected to understand this connection,
 nor do I.
 This is as it must be.
 There is no different way.

The trouble with being honest in all my feelings
 about my father is that in the empathic moments
 they all come right back around and confront me
 with the bare truth about myself.

The anger, when I dare to face it,
 tells me as much about myself as about my father.
 My own anger frightens me sometimes,
 as did my father's when I was a boy.
 It is intense and not always directed where it
 belongs.

How far back, then, must one go and where must one
 look to find the family culprits who say,

⁴ This is a poem I wrote in 1993. It is also included within the text of Chapter 2 on healing the Father wound.

"You're not worth a damn?"
 These voices, I can't quite make them out,
 taunt me with their cruel accusations.
 I want to confront these devious, resentful naysayers,
 and put an end to the cycle of pain
 once and for all.

It may not be murder I'm after, though.
 Rather a profound embrace of a side of myself,
 a side of my father,
 that I haven't dared to face.
 It's hard to say with whom I am dealing.

Fairy Tale: "The Dark Man's Sooty Brother"⁵

Once upon a time there was a soldier who had just been discharged. While walking in the woods, in that curious mood we feel after having been discharged, he met a man with an odd-shaped foot. "Why are you sad?" "I don't know what to do next." "You could work for me." "What is the work?" "You would live underground at my place and spend seven years working for me. Then you're free. During that time, you cannot comb your hair, nor wash, nor cut your fingernails or your toenails nor your beard, nor wipe the tears from your eyes."

So he went with a man who took him underground and showed him the three pots. "You'll be tending my three pots and keeping them boiling. You will not look into the pots. Is that clear? And the shavings you will sweep behind the door. Can you do it?"

"I can," he said.

He chopped wood, put the wood chunks under the huge, black covered pots, kept the fires going, and swept the shavings behind the door. After three or four months, he said to himself, "I think I'll peek into the first pot." He did, and to his surprise he saw his sergeant sitting there. "Oh ho!" he said. "You had me in your power, but now I have you in my power." And he added more wood to that fire. He worked a few more months, and then felt the desire to peek into the second pot. He did and saw his

⁵ Reprinted from Robert Bly, "The Dark Man's Sooty Brother: Male Naivete and the Loss of the Kingdom," in Psyche's Stories: Modern Jungian Interpretations of Fairy Tales, eds. Murray Stein and Lionel Corbett, vol. 1 (Wilmette, Ill: Chiron Publications, 1991), 91-93. Used by permission of the author.

lieutenant sitting there. "Ah ha!" he said. "You once had me in your power, but now I have you in my power." And he added a lot more wood to that fire. Six months or so later, he couldn't resist his longing to peek into the third pot. He lifted the cover and who did he see but his old general--General Westmoreland!--sitting in that pot. "Well, well!" he said. "Once you had me in your power, but now I have you in my power." He chopped extra wood and added good dry oak under that pot.

When the Dark Man returned to see how the work was going, he remarked, "By the way, you looked into the pots, and if you hadn't added more wood, I really would have punished you."

Time seemed to pass faster now, what with the extra chopping each day, and week by week the time went by, and the seven years were up.

The Dark Man returned and said, "You've done your work well." He swept up some of the shavings behind the door, put them in a gunny-sack, gave the sack to the man, and said, "Here are your wages." The man was disappointed, but what can you do? Always remember to arrange your wages beforehand. The Dark One said: "When anyone asks you where you have come from, you say, 'From under the earth.' If they ask you who you are, you are to say, 'I am the Dark Man's Sooty Brother and my King as well.'" It didn't really make sense, but he memorized the sentence and prepared to go back to the world.

He left the workplace and the strangest thing was this: as he made his way up to our world, the shavings in his bag all turned to gold. That pleased him, of course. Eventually had come to an inn and asked for a room. "Where do you come from?" asked the innkeeper. "From under the earth." "Who are you?" "I am the Dark Man's Sooty Brother and my King as well." He hadn't shaved for seven years, or wiped the tears from his eyes--you remember that--so the innkeeper did not find him to be an appetizing guest, and said, "I'm sorry, but I have no rooms left for tonight." Then this worker made his first mistake--he opened the sack and showed the innkeeper his gold. The innkeeper now said, "Well, as I think of it, I remember that my brother, who has been in number 10, is going away this weekend, and you can have his room tonight." So it was. In the middle of the night the innkeeper crept into the room and stole the gold. Our friend felt bad about it, but he said to himself: "It was through no fault of mine," and decided to go back underground.

He found the Dark Man, told him what happened and

what he wanted. The Dark Man said, "Sit down, I'll wash you now and comb your hair, and cut your nails and beard, and wipe your eyes." When that was done, the Dark Man gave him a second bag of shavings and said, "Tell the innkeeper you want your gold back. If he doesn't do it, he'll have to come here and take your place. I will come for him." So Hans told the innkeeper that and reminded him that if he went down, he would end up looking just like Hans did. That was enough; the innkeeper gave him the money back and more. So Hans was rich now.

He started off to see his father, brought a white coat of coarse cloth, and made a living traveling around the country and performing music on an instrument he had learned to play while underground. Eventually, the King of that country heard his music and offered Hans his oldest daughter. When she saw the quality of his coat, she said, "I'd prefer to jump in the river." So, he married the youngest daughter and got half the kingdom. When the King died, Hans inherited the entire kingdom. That was luck. As for storytellers, we still wander around with holes in our shoes.

Session 5: Finding Our FathersPoem: "Thinking About My Father"⁶

I have to go back
past the way he was
at the end, panting
for breath, begging
for medicine, crazy
from medicine taken
for years. This is
hard because in his
dying, he was vivid,
excruciatingly slow,
and profoundly self-
absorbed, as if his
death required more
energy and devotion
than we could ever
bring to his bedside.

But then there he is
at home, at his desk
in the den, where he
was able to be most
truly himself, paying
bills--he was happy
doing that--reading
the paper, then best
of all, beautifully
solving its crossword
puzzle. My father was
the absolute master
of crossword puzzles
in the *Roanoke Times*.

I do not mean to say
that he shut himself
off from us. It was
just that we learned
to approach his desk
for quiet attention.
He breathed a light
whistle between his
teeth while he helped
me balance my paper

⁶ Reprinted from David Huddle, "Thinking About My Father," in A Good Man: Fathers and Sons in Poetry and Prose, ed. Irv Broughton (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 38-40. Used by permission.

route money, coat my
model airplane's silk
wing with banana oil,
hinge a new Brazilian
stamp into my album.

My father did things
with a care that was
more important to him
than the thing itself.
For example, painting
by the numbers: no one
ever number-painted so
gravely and precisely.
His Saint Bernards hang
over his desk, his blue
jays over the toilet so
that every peeing male
must witness the craft
of his terrible picture.

His pleasures were fresh
things, mail just pulled
from his post office box,
unthumbed newspapers, new
model airplane kits, sets
of mint-condition stamps
in glassine envelopes.
With his hands he savored
a new harmonica so that I
still see as sacred those
little Hohner boxes with
pictures on them of old-
time German concert bands.

I don't have any fresh
insight into my father
or his life. Thinking
about him like this, I
miss him, and I forget
how horrible his death
was. Some mornings I
wake up feeling bad for
no reason I can think of,
and then all day he'll be
on my mind, dying again.

I have no memory of his
holding me as an infant,
but we have an old home
movie in which my twenty-
two year old mother walks

out onto the front porch
 and hands a baby to this
 thin young man. Some days
 I wake up limp and happy
 as that child, smiled at
 and lifted up to the sun
 by someone who wanted me
 right here in this world.

Story: untitled⁷

My father was basketball's first giant as the six-foot-five center of the legendary Original Celtics. His playing days were followed by thirty years of coaching with St. John's and the Knicks. His won-lost record resulted in recognition, fan adulation and the respect of the media and the public. As a very young boy I didn't realize that his fame came as much from his persona as his records. The adulation and respect came largely from a recognition of his caring and compassion for others.

I wanted to make him proud of me, and I thought that if I could have become a star myself that I would somehow fulfill his needs.

Such a reading was easy to come by. All his friends and our neighbors told me that I was sure to follow in his footsteps. Christmas and birthdays brought gifts of basketballs, baseballs, mitts, golf balls and clubs. Neighborhood fathers wanted to teach me to shoot, wanted me to play with their kids in the hope that the Lapchick magic might rub off on them. As I look back to those days, and see parents' reactions today, the draw and power of the sports experience seems even stronger if more bizarre. They were doing this to me when I was five, six and seven years old. I felt such pressure from all the others. I had to be good. The only person not exerting pressure was my father. I couldn't understand how he could spend endless hours talking to me, going for walks with me, playing word games and board games with me, yet never playing basketball with me. Never even talking about playing basketball.

One week before my eighth birthday I contracted polio. Eyes moistened, my father carried me to the ambulance. I

⁷ Reprinted from Richard E. Lapchick, untitled story, in Sons on Fathers: A Book of Men's Writings, ed. Ralph Keyes (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 32-33. Used by permission.

could feel his emotions through his trembling yet powerful arms. As sick and half-delirious as I was, this moment sealed a bond between us that can only come from total communication between father and son.

Two days later a neighbor visited the hospital. He asked my father, "Do the doctors think Richie will ever be able to play basketball again?" Not if he'll be able to walk, not if he'll be able to lead a normal life, but will he ever be able to play basketball? My father was too polite to express the revulsion he felt.

The next day he asked me if I wanted to be a basketball player. In response to my enthusiastic, "yes," he told me that all he wanted for me was to have a normal and happy life and for me to give something back to society. The realization for the first time that it was not important to him for me to be an athlete was puzzling to me at age seven. I wanted to be an athlete more than ever and would spend hours each day over the course of the next decade trying to prove that I had the talent that I never really possessed. Puzzled at seven, I recognized at seventeen that my father had given me perhaps his greatest gift on that morning in Grasslands Hospital. he freed me of the need to please him and gave me the opportunity to fulfill myself.

Session 6: Raising Our Children Well

Story: "The Man Who Did Not Wish to Die"⁸

Long ago, there lived a wealthy man who inherited a fortune and lived a life of ease. He was known as the millionaire. One day, a terrible thought struck him. "I shall die someday! But I want to live forever!" From that moment, he grew troubled in spirit.

Eventually, the millionaire heard tales about the Elixir of Life, possessed by hermits in the mountains. So he left his home, seeking the sages. He climbed the highest peaks and searched all the valleys, but try as he might, he found nobody with the magic elixir. One day, the millionaire met a hunter, and asked the man if he knew of any hermits nearby.

"No," the hunter replied, "but there is a band of robbers who live in this forest."

The millionaire felt discouraged. He went to a temple, and prayed to the god of hermits for six days and nights. On the seventh night, the door to the sanctuary flew open. A great light shone from within and the god of hermits stepped out.

"Foolish man!" the god scolded the millionaire. "How do you expect to find the Elixir of Life, when you have lived a life of ease, pleasing only yourself?"

The millionaire trembled, but could not say anything. The god went on. "You know nothing of spiritual discipline, and only those who do can drink the Elixir of Life!"

"But I do not wish to die!" the millionaire pleaded.

The deity paused, took out a small crane made of paper, and gave it to the millionaire. "You lack the wisdom to drink the Elixir of Life, but this crane will take you to the land where no one dies." The god vanished.

In the next moment, the crane grew larger and larger. The millionaire climbed on its back and the bird leaped into the air. They flew for many miles over a great ocean.

⁸ Reprinted from Allan B. Chinen, Once Upon a Midlife: Classic Stories and Mythic Tales to Illuminate the Middle Years (New York: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1992), 97-99. Used by permission.

until they came to a distant shore. The crane landed upon a beach, and the man hastened to the nearest habitation.

"What land is this?" the millionaire asked the first person he met.

"It is the land of perpetual life!" the man replied, and the millionaire rejoiced. The stranger was friendly and helped the millionaire find a home and a job in the town. The millionaire settled down and then noticed how strange his neighbors were. They collected poisonous mushrooms and ate them; they caught venomous snakes and played with them; and they bleached their hair white, so as to look older.

The millionaire asked the people to explain their odd behavior. They said, "We want to die! We are tired of living forever, and we have heard of a place called Paradise, where only the dead can go!"

The millionaire shook his head. "I never want to die!"

The years rolled by and became centuries, and the millionaire became bored with life. Every day was the same as the next. One afternoon, the millionaire walked by the beach. "I hate this life!" he muttered to himself. "If only I could return to my own land and live like an ordinary person, dying in my own time!" Then he had an idea. "If the god of hermits brought me here, perhaps he will let me return home to die." The millionaire said a prayer, and in the next moment something fell from his pocket. It was the old paper crane from the god of hermits, and before his very eyes, the bird grew larger and larger. The millionaire climbed on the crane, and the bird took flight.

As they flew over the sea, a storm struck. The paper wings of the crane crumpled in the rain, and the bird fell into the sea. "Help! Help! I will drown!" the millionaire cried out, floundering in the ocean. The millionaire saw a shark circling. "Help! Help! I don't want to die!" the poor man pleaded with the god of hermits.

In the next instant, the millionaire found himself sprawled on the floor of the mountain temple, screaming for help. The door to the sanctuary opened, a great light filled the hall, and a divine being emerged from the shrine.

"I am a messenger from the god of hermits," the luminous figure said. "He sent you to the land of

perpetual life in a dream, because you yearned for immortality. Then you asked for death, so the god sent the storm and the shark to test you. But you only pleaded for your life once more." The messenger looked sadly at the millionaire. "You have no perseverance or faith. Immortality and the secrets of eternity are not for you." The celestial figure then brought out a book. "Go back to your home and family," the shining messenger said, "and be content with your lot. The god gives you this book of wisdom. Follow its advice--work hard, raise your children well, provide for their future, and help your neighbors. Then you will fear death no more." With those words, the messenger vanished.

The millionaire returned home with his book of wisdom. And from then on, he followed its counsel. He lived a good, honest life, and when his day finally came, he died with a smile on his lips.

Poem: "Late Afternoon Walk"⁹

The sun hangs, like a painting, silently in its place. We move away from its intense glare. The wind stirs softly, causing dried leaves to float around our feet as we proceed with no apparent mission at hand. The day has been filled with work for me and play for him. Play is the work of children. It is they who call play out of us. "Daddy, will you play with me?"

My boy and I walk past dogs, some raising their protests long and loud. He holds my hand, his small hand swallowed in mine, letting go only to bend and pick up a desired rock or stick for his treasured collection. He talks and I listen to earnest accounts of how his teacher said sugar is bad for your teeth and how one boy pushed another and made him cry.

A group of birds appear to our left. We stop and gaze up as these chattering acrobats put on their show for us. "Daddy, look! The birds are having a party up there." "Yes, they are," I laugh, glad that I have him to help me see with new eyes.

⁹ This is a prose poem I wrote in 1993 after taking a walk one spring day with my four-year-old son Ethan.

APPENDIX D

Evaluation Form

Rate the quality of the following dimensions of our group experience:

	Low			High	
Interaction of group members	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership of group facilitator	1	2	3	4	5
Sense of community	1	2	3	4	5
Written exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Stories and myths	1	2	3	4	5
Meditations	1	2	3	4	5
Depth of sharing	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional honesty of participants	1	2	3	4	5
Room surroundings	1	2	3	4	5
Overall	1	2	3	4	5

In what ways has the group experience matched or not matched your expectations coming into the group?

Complete the following sentences:

I liked...

I didn't like...

What changes in format might improve our experience together?

In what ways, if any, do you see the role of fathering differently than before you joined this group?

Take a few moments to reflect on any new learnings or insights you have had as a result of participating in this group and write them here.

Evaluate your own level of openness and participation:

Any other comments:

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